GILLES KEPEL

Away from CHAOS

The Middle East and the Challenge to the West

— Translated by Henry Randolph —

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To the memory of my father
Milan Kepel
(Prague, 1928 – Paris, 2019)

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Away from Chaos

Introduction

A Testament for Syria

FOUR DECADES BEFORE writing this book, I spent the year 1977–1978 in Syria on an Arab language scholarship at the French Institute in Damascus. For budding Arabists, it was the "Open sesame" that would admit us to the cave hiding the grammatical and phonetic secrets of the region that we loved. Careers in those days rarely started without a sojourn in Shām, as we called it among ourselves. This was the Semitic term both for the Levant and its traditional capital in the local dialect. In the orientation of Muslim geography, in which one faces Mecca from the west, Shām was to the left, or north, while Yemen, in the opposite direction, meant right or south.

Neither I nor my classmates could have imagined that, forty years later, this same Shām would become the rallying point in the French *banlieues*, or disadvantaged suburbs, for jihadists ready to join the Islamic State (also known as ISIS, ISIL, or Daesh) and massacre "unbelievers." Initially, they concentrated on the Alawites, that esoteric sect to which Syria's president at the time, Hafez al-Assad, belonged (his son Bashar was twelve years old during my Syria sojourn). It would be a mere prelude, however, to the French jihadists returning home and killing their "infidel" fellow citizens at the Bataclan night club and the French National Stadium on November 13, 2015. And, in my worst nightmares, I could not have dreamed that, in June 2016, I would find myself condemned to death for being an experienced Arabist. The sentence was passed by a Franco-Algerian member of ISIS from the cities of Roanne (in France) and Oran (in Algeria). He was then based

in the Syrian town of Raqqa, designated by the Islamic State self-styled "caliphate"as its short-lived capital. The jihadist's acolyte, the French-Moroccan killer of a policeman and his wife in the western French town of Magnanville, then posted the threat on Facebook.live. To my utter disbelief, this would force me to live under police protection in Paris in, of all places, the Latin Quarter.

But back in the late 1970s, of course, the internet was not on anyone's horizon yet. The flat world atlas still consisted of bordered spaces mapped out and divided into so many countries with heavy, black lines. It differed little from the map of the Roman empire tacked up above the blackboard in my college classics course in 1974. This was the map that first set me to dreaming of the Middle East, so that I took ship from Venice the following summer for Istanbul, the Levant, and Egypt on a voyage of discovery to the physical lands I had looked at on the two-dimensional map. Back then, who could have foreseen the endless fissioning of the world's minds and its imagery that cyberspace and online social networks would set off? Or, for that matter, could anyone have envisioned the mental confusion that would wipe out distance and perspective, blot out spatial and temporal reference points to make us lose our bearings forty years later?

While the Damascus I encountered in the late 1970s was still calm, chaos reigned in neighboring Lebanon. A civil war with its attendant private atrocities pitted the "Islamo-Progressive" camp against Christian Conservatives along political and confessional lines that testified to the entanglement of these two identities between Muslim progressives and Christian conservatives. The hybrid labels expressed a conflict over the armed presence of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. It saw the mainly pro-Western, demographically declining Maronites struggle for power with Sunnis leaning toward the socialist camp—tagging them with the "progressive" attribute that today seems absurdly outdated. At the time, few observers were wise to the game played by the Arabian Peninsula's oil kingdoms and Saudi Wahhabism, made fabulously wealthy by the dizzying rise in the price of oil in the wake of the October 1973 war. Their new riches let them take leading roles in the region's virulent re-Islamization in attempts to quash the urbane spirit of the Levant of my youth. Nor could anyone have foreseen how the Iranian revolution would stir up the masses. It turned the hitherto marginalized Shiites, radicalized by this competing Islamist ideology, into the major political power in Lebanon and beyond. It was they who would

now dominate a vast crescent of territories stretching across Syria and Iraq to Persia.

This Levantine civilization fascinated me and my classmates at the Institute in Damascus, and we projected our muddled fantasies on it. Frankly, we had read little, and only had a passing acquaintance with the body of works by travelers in the region since Volney or Chateaubriand, our forgotten predecessors. For the most part, we cultivated a crude leftism, an ideology that had dominated the student microcosm during the decade after May 1968. During the ensuing ten years, however, it had shed its original dogmatism. That left us with an imprecise doxa, a scattershot vision of the world oriented on a few certainties stamped by anti-imperialism and anti-Zionism. In wagering on their collapse, we placed our bets a priori on the Syria of Hafez al-Assad, the tip of the spear in resisting Israel.

Disillusionment was not long in coming. I loved the Syrian landscape, which reminded me of my familial village in the Nice countryside of long childhood vacations. It also evoked the epic of the Odyssey I had just read in my college Graeco-Latin humanities classes. However, this romanticized musing on the past could not for long obscure the brutality of a regime and the violence of a society that I experienced or observed firsthand. (Riad Sattouf, born that same year, 1978, captured this reality well in his 2014 graphic novel *The Arab of the Future*.) My classmates and I, used to the unfettered freedom of the Latin Quarter, learned to lower our voices in public and to suspect everyone as we lived life in a dictatorship "of the left." We avoided speaking of those who had disappeared in the jails, and did not socialize with anyone who knew them. Amid all this, at the French Institute of Damascus, I met the researcher Michel Seurat, eight years my senior (born in 1947). It was a rare privilege. A superb Arabist and sociologist who had studied under Professor Alain Touraine, he dedicated himself to analyzing the Syrian regime. Domiciled later in Lebanon with his wife and young daughters, he would pay for his research with his life. Taken hostage on May 22, 1985 at the Beirut airport by a shadowy Islamic Jihad Organization linked to Teheran and Damascus, he died in captivity in 1986, maligned by his killers as "a specialist researcher spy."

Even before this traumatic event, which left its mark on me and profoundly altered my outlook, the disillusionment born of the shocking reality of Syria had impelled me to return to Paris. Inspired by the esteem I felt for Michel Seurat, I dropped the by-then hybridized classic humanities-cum-ancient

Arab civilization program I had been pursuing. Instead, to help me make sense of the drama playing out in the Middle East, which had me questioning my simplistic certitudes, I enrolled in political science studies.

Shortly after my admission to Sciences Po university in 1978, I had to confront another paradox: the onset of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Despite my year in Damascus, I lacked the background necessary for putting into perspective both a revolutionary Islamization in Teheran, at once Shiite and anti-imperialist, and its reactionary Sunni and anti-socialist counterpart in Riyadh. At this time, moreover, started the cycle of turmoil driven by astronomical oil price increases and an intensifying political Islam that would pull the Levant apart. These two correlated phenomena have structured the past half-century, consuming the history of two generations. It was in the land of Shām that they reached a monstrous fever pitch with the proclamation of the ISIS caliphate at the start of Ramadan on June 29, 2014.

That year also saw an unexpected 70 percent drop in the price of crude. It forced a rethinking of medium- and long-term scenarios for developing the region, of its political, economic, and social models, and even of the place religion would occupy in it. This cataclysm had several causes, including shale oil production in the United States that would see it topple Russia and Saudi Arabia as the world's top producer. But also at work were changes in consumer behavior in the OECD countries. There, the increased use of electric vehicles and consequent drop in demand for oil was starting to put permanent downward pressure on its price. These concurrent developments put into play the rentier economy we have come to associate with the Middle East for the past half-century. They also meant that a reckoning was in store for its corollary, the hegemony of political Islam, whose spread the oil kingdoms of the Arabian Peninsula and their Iranian rivals on the opposite shore of the Persian Gulf both had abetted.

A seemingly trivial event in late 2017 highlighted an unprecedented decoupling of the peninsular dynasties and institutionalized Salafism. It had provided religious cover for dynastic power, while it spread with royal backing throughout the Sunni Muslim world. On September 26, over the protests of the ulemas invoking their rigid conception of morality, King Salman of Saudi Arabia ordered that women would be allowed to drive in the kingdom after the end of Ramadan 2018. The royal decree came nearly twenty-seven years to the day—one generation later—when Saudi women

on November 6, 1990 had taken the wheel in Riyadh, only to be chased down and castigated for their temerity.

Next, enter Crown Prince Mohammad ben Salman, a mere thirty-two years old, a first for this kingdom ruled by old men. He was intent on revamping the Saudi labor market, inclusive of newly mobile women, as an insurance policy for the post-oil era. In November 2017, he therefore launched a broadside against the extremism to which the country had been committed since 1979. That was a watershed year, which began with Ayatollah Khomeini's triumphant return to Teheran and ended with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, setting the stage for jihad in that country. 1979 was also the year Pandora's box opened, unleashing the global Islamic terrorism plaguing us to this day. It is thus the essence of the Saudi-Wahhabite system that is suddenly in question, after dominating the Middle East ever since oil was used as a political weapon to produce a victory in the October 1973 war between Israel and the Arab states. How the two sides referred to that conflict—as the Yom Kippur War and the Ramadan War respectively—was a telling symbol of how religious dogma would invade the political sphere in the years ahead.

The following pages will seek to put into perspective these chaotic decades, and then reflect on possible ways of breaking with them. This half-century coincides with the experience I gained on the ground as witness, observer, and chronicler—to the point of being condemned to death by ISIS for my studies. Hence, these pages will reflect a personalized mindset guiding the selection and organization of the facts. As such, trivial events that I find revealing will be projected against a background scan of the long term.

The four chapters of part I provide a lineal synthesis of the first four decades, starting with the October War of 1973 and ending with the uprisings known as the Arab Spring that became reality in the winter of 2010–2011. These forty years saw the rise of Islamicized politics and jihad gradually spiraling over the planet. They started in the year 1979, with the fighting in Afghanistan and the Americans going in with guns blazing in response to the Iranian revolution. This initial outburst of modern-day jihad would succeed with the USSR's demise ten years later. Successive chapters will deal with the three phases of this jihadism that was visited upon the United States on September 11, 2001 in a backlash that was both stupefying and dramatic. It was an arresting start of a Christian millenary overlaid

by an improbable Islamist millennium. This retrospective will draw on the half-dozen works I have published on the topic, ranging from *Prophet and Pharaoh* (1984) to *Beyond Terror and Martyrdom* (2008). But, in doing so, I will retain and organize only the material that strikes me as relevant today for interpreting the crucial phenomena marking the 2010 decade.

These perplexing ten years, covered in part II, began with the immense optimism of the Arab Spring of 2011. Then ISIS proclaimed its Islamic State, spurring the generalized spread of Islamist terrorism to European territory. That decade eventually saw the fall of the ISIS caliphate in the autumn of 2017 as Raqqa was liberated on the heels of the reconquest of Mosul. In between, democratic uprisings giving rise to immense hopes were juxtaposed with the sheer horror of ISIS, authoritarian regimes seizing the reins contrasted with the flourishing of rogue states and lawless areas. The analysis of these contradictions will call on field studies and research I conducted on both sides of the Mediterranean.

Fed by questions I addressed in *The Arab Passion* (2013) and *Terror in France* (2015), in these chapters will pass in review the six countries that underwent an Arab upheaval—Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Yemen, and Syria. I give added consideration to Iraq because the ISIS monster was born where it joins Syria. Thanks to the demise of ISIS in late 2017, we are far enough removed to put the happenings of this tragic period into perspective. I have made every effort to pull together a comprehensive picture from the mass of facts we have only recently come to know—or experienced violently—firsthand. My primary goal is to distill these reflections into teaching points that join the history of the moment in a continuous arc with the long memory of the preceding decades. As the reader will see, it is the Levant—and especially Syria—that constitute the heart of this book and thus have more pages devoted to them. I am convinced that the crises shaking the Mediterranean and the Middle East crystallized in this area and were driven to extremes there.

Part III dwells on the events following the downfall of ISIS and the heralded defeat of the Syrian rebellion, up to Donald Trump's decision to pull out U.S. troops from northeastern Syria in October 2019, to the troublesome reshuffling of regional cards between an assertive Turkey, a defiant Iran, and Vladimir Putin as the regional kingmaker in the wake of American redeployment. In these chapters, I take the measure of the tectonic shifts these events foreshadow. Much of this material I gathered firsthand in

crisscrossing North Africa, the Near East, and the Middle East. It should allow us to see in sharper relief a set of hypothesized scenarios applicable to both shores of the Mediterranean—for better or for worse. What does the future hold for jihadism and Salafism, the fragmenting of the Sunni bloc, and the wrenching changes underway in the Arabian Peninsula? Will Iran secure its hegemony over the Shiite Crescent, or will confrontation with the America of Donald Trump turn its success into a Pyrrhic victory? How will Vladimir Putin's Russia, its great power status regained thanks to its involvement in the Syrian problem, arbitrage between an improbable set of allies like Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran? And what about Europe, caught in the heart of a crisis zone whose main front is a Mediterranean permeable to terrorists and refugees? Will it overcome its passivity and reassert itself as a geopolitical protagonist? With its institutions at a standstill and Brexit looming, can it only fecklessly watch the centrifugal pressures brought by parties both of the extreme right and of a leftist populism infused with rising Islamism in its marginalized banlieues?

The neglect of the Mediterranean and the Middle East by the American superpower ramping up as the major shale oil and gas producer is building up. It started during Obama's presidency, and his successor Donald Trump has doubled down on it in spectacular fashion. The forty-fifth American president, "making America great again," decided he couldn't care less about the intricacies of foreign policies that had brought unsavory military action from Afghanistan to Iraq, while they had a huge cost for taxpayers and a heavy toll on American lives—more than seven thousand soldiers died between the commencement of the retaliatory attack on Afghanistan in the wake of 9/11 and the final pullout from Iraq in 2016. And a significant amount of the dead came from Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin—three of the swing states that gave victory to Donald Trump in 2016. But would such a focus on domestic policies, aimed at winning reelection in November 2020, lead to some new form of isolationism that could shield America, in the post–9/11 world, from attacks on its soil? Or, on the contrary, would such a pullback be perceived as a sign of weakness signaling the decline of the American hegemon, thirty years after the disappearance of its Soviet rival when the Berlin Wall fell on November 9, 1989? And to that extent could erratic White House decisions strike back with a vengeance, pushing unresolved issues in the Middle East onto the presidential campaign agenda to the incumbent's detriment—as happened in 1980 when Iran cost Jimmy Carter his reelection?

President Trump took exactly such a step on January 2, 2020, when he ordered General Qasem Soleimani to be killed by a drone as the charismatic Iranian military strongman's convoy was leaving Baghdad airport. Tension had escalated between Teheran and Washington in Iraq—the only country where there was some sort of coexistence between two erstwhile enemies—after a mob under the guidance of pro-Iran militias had attacked the U.S. embassy in Baghdad the previous days. Such one-upmanship raised the stakes of conflict and crises in the Middle East to an unprecedented level, while also involving the U.S. presidential election into the type of foreign military action that the incumbent had previously disdained.

These uncertainties compel Europe to step up and shoulder its obligations. In configuring this effort, restoring the Levant represents a high-stakes necessity. True, the region has been deprived of its lifeblood by the diaspora of its most enterprising people to the shores of the Persian Gulf. But, with the future Gulf impacted by the structural decline of crude prices, they may also return home in the near future. Further, with the opposing forces exhausted by the slaughter, the Levant can reaffirm its role as linchpin between Europe, the West and the Middle East, and as key to their mutual survival. This would pave the way for averting a cultural showdown that can only perpetuate the turmoil of the past decades. By defining the outlines of this imperative, the present work intends to make a modest contribution to foreseeing our future—away from chaos.

PART I
The Barrel and the Koran

ONE

The Islamization of the Political Order

The Twilight of Arab Nationalism

To begin, we will stake out the October 1973 war as the beginning of the Middle East's era of chaos. Continuing to this day, it spread to the world on September 11, 2001 before culminating with the rise of ISIS (Islamic State) in 2014–2017. But first, we must look back to a major generational split in the political elite that had seized power in the region as colonial rule was on its last legs. Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser and Tunisia's Prime Minister Habib Bourguiba were its most famous leaders, and its most iconic parties were the Baath in Syria and Iraq and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). All distanced themselves from using Islam to legitimize their rule, in contrast to what the Arab and Ottoman dynasties had done for fourteen centuries for imposing their authority. This had been the tradition ever since the early seventh century CE, when the Prophet had preached and established his order in Medina and Mecca, marking the start of the Hegira in 622.

Until the 1960s, the Baath, like the Neo Destour party in Tunisia, embraced a secularism that had nothing to envy in the one Atatürk adopted when he replaced the Ottoman Empire with the Republic of Turkey. The same held true for the version prevailing at the court of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Nasser, for his part, repurposed Cairo's thousand-year old Al-Azhar mosque-university as a tool for his third-world propaganda and multiplied

his anti-clerical swipes. Still, he made a point of openly attending Friday prayers because he wanted to coopt the popular piety of the Egyptian masses. But then he proceeded to mercilessly repress the Muslim Brotherhood, the template for political Islam on the banks of the Nile during the twentieth century.

A teacher, Hassan al-Banna, founded the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928 in Ismailiya, the capital of the international Suez Canal enclave on Egyptian territory and symbol of European colonial domination. The Brotherhood wanted to re-ignite the same torch that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had just extinguished in abolishing the Ottoman caliphate in 1924. Regarding Nasser as its secular arm, the Brotherhood had initially cheered him on when he took over in 1952 with his comrades, the Free Officers. They fully expected him to install a political regime based on sharia, the Islamic law inspired by the Holy Scriptures. He did not, and, in the end, the one-time allies turned on each other, with Nasser dismantling the organization in 1954 and having several of its leaders hanged. Those who could escaped to exile on the Arabian Peninsula, where they honed their indoctrinating skills. The remaining cadres wound up in Egyptian maximum-security prisons where torture was routine. Among them was Sayyid Qutb, activist and man of letters, who would become the grand ideologue of modern-day jihadism.

However, the splitting of the state power from religious institutions was only a counterfeit of the democratic secularism found in Europe. First, instead of a true separation of the political and religious spheres, the often atrophied religious institutions were merely subordinated to the political power structure. The objective was to exert social control or demonstrate the compatibility of Islam with nationalist or, as it were, socialist ideology. Second, and above all, the elites in control of the independence process had seized power by whatever means required, including force. Despite the promises of democracy proffered in response to their yearning for freedom, the former colonies had merely changed masters. Discipline was now imposed by indigenous military, dynastic, or partisan cliques that frequently were more heavy-handed than even the former colonial masters.

The betrayal of democracy's promise was accompanied by mediocre economic and social performances. Invocations of justice and substantive law became nothing more than the two-faced discourse of despots. In the Arab states, particularly in the Middle East but especially in the frontline states bordering Israel, the urgency of fighting the Zionist enemy was used to

justify this forfeit. Anti-Zionism was, in effect, the third stage of the nationalism first manifested in the nineteenth century against Ottoman domination, and then in the twentieth century against European colonial tutelage. It regarded the implanting of the Jewish state in the Levant's heart and on Palestinian territory as the last stage of the hated colonialism. Eliminating Israel thus became a permanent fixture of Arab nationalist rhetoric.

A number of pivotal events combined to bolster this Arab nationalism. First, there was the humiliation of the *nakba* ("catastrophe"), the defeat of the Arab armies in 1948, followed by David Ben Gurion's declaration establishing the state of Israel on May 15 of that year. Then came the 1956 Suez crisis, when a tripartite Anglo-French-Israeli expeditionary force assembled to challenge Nasser's nationalizing the Suez Canal and ultimately had to withdraw under international pressure. Cairo nevertheless aligned itself with the USSR and practiced socialism on the Soviet model. Finally, the Six-Day War in June 1967 dealt Arab nationalism its ultimate *naksa* ("defeat"). The war had started with a lightning Israeli airstrike in retaliation for the Egyptian president blockading the Straits of Tiran to prevent supplies from reaching Eilat in the Gulf of Aqaba. When it ended, the Israeli army had occupied the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank including East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights. Territorial losses of this magnitude in such a short period of time represented the ultimate moral failure of the nationalist Arab leaders who had emerged with independence. Their rhetoric had suddenly been punctured like a balloon by the hard military reality on the ground.

For Egypt, the *naksa* was the final blow in a series of domestic and international reverses. After 1962, the Egyptian army had become bogged down in a costly, bloody war of attrition in Yemen where it supported the republican forces against the Saudi-backed royalists. In 1966, Nasser, confronted by growing popular discontent, had Sayyid Qutb, by now the Muslim Brotherhood's chief ideologue, executed. Qutb had just published his manifesto *Signposts*, that would play for the Islamist political movement the role of Lenin's famous *What is to be done* for communist parties worldwide. In this founding document for jihadists of the next generation, he turns the prison in which the Brothers are tortured into the perfect symbol of a hated Arab nationalism. He identifies it with the *jahiliyya*, the age of ignorance or barbarity that the Scriptures say prevailed in Arabia before the Prophet revealed the Koran, and which he then stamped out with Islam.

Qutb calls for a similar destruction of the *jahiliyya* of the twentieth century embodied by Nasserism. He advocated using any available means, including the "movement" (*haraka*), meaning armed jihad. By excommunicating the Nasser regime and declaring it impious (*takfir*), *Signposts* summoned up religious legitimacy to justify holy war against the nationalist state. This master stroke—which not everyone in the Muslim Brotherhood agreed with—would give rise to the radical current in the organization. It would later undergo immense development, from Afghanistan to al-Qaeda. In 1966, Qutb was punished for his manifesto by being hanged. The June 1967 Arab defeat in the Six-Day War convinced many of his disciples that it was Allah punishing Nasser for having His martyr killed.

The president stepped down but returned to power after an immense throng marched across Egypt to shouts of "Nasser come back!" But when he died three years later, the Arab nationalism he had incarnated would not survive him. Political Islam would fill this great vacuum to become the dominant ideological core of the region. It would find its principal lever in the October War of 1973.

Egypt was the big loser in the June 1967 war, and its defeat sank the Nasserite brand of Arab nationalism. For a while, a Palestinian cause seeking to emancipate itself from the Arab states would replace it. In 1969, the new leader of the PLO, Yasser Arafat, shook off Egyptian tutelage. He made Jordan, inhabited by many Palestinian refugees, his rear base for waging armed struggle against Israel. In effect, he established a state within a state that challenged the authority of King Hussein. The tensions the Palestinian organizations stoked in the process peaked on September 6, 1970. On this date, three airliners were hijacked to a Jordanian airport at Zarqa by the PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine), a Marxist group led by George Habache. The ensuing crackdown resulted in thousands of Palestinian deaths.

Negotiation that got underway three weeks later resulted in the Cairo Agreement between Arafat, King Hussein, and Nasser—the latter dying soon after its signature. It meant the armed Palestinian factions would leave Jordan for resettlement in refugee camps in Lebanon, the weakest country in the region. The Palestinians would contribute to that country's breakdown five years later, and to the progressive destruction of the Levant. All this would unfold in a context completely transformed by the Islamization of politics spurred on by the new Saudi hegemon that emerged after the October War of 1973.

The Trigger: The Ramadan War of October 1973

Anwar Sadat, who succeeded Nasser in September 1970 as the compromise candidate of a divided general staff, took office under a cloud. Popular *nukat* (jokes) held him out to be stupid. The pressure on him was that much greater because he wanted to erase the humiliation of June 1967 by mounting a counterattack, but he lacked the resources. Still, this wily peasant from the Nile Delta outfoxed everyone who underestimated him—except for the jihadists that eventually assassinated him. Drawn to the Muslim Brotherhood in his youth, Sadat had its members released from prison and discreetly encouraged their activism on university campuses where Marxists and leftist Nasserites were his most virulent opponents. In a few years, they had been eliminated and the *gama'a islamiyya* (Islamic associations) with Qutbist loyalties took control of student activism.

At the same time, Sadat prepared an attack on the lines of the dug-in Israeli forces. Helping him were Soviet military advisors connected with Syrian president Hafez al-Assad, who had come to power, like Sadat, in the wake of the defeat. For maximum advantage, the surprise attack began on October 6, 1973 while the Israelis were fasting for Yom Kippur. The Egyptian army broke through the fortified Bar-Lev line along the Suez Canal, and the Syrians drove into the Golan, occupied by Israel since 1967. The successes scored in this first offensive led the regimes' lackeys to bestow glowing titles on the two leaders. Sadat became the "hero of the crossing" (*batal al-'oubour*) and al-Assad the "lion of October" (*Assad tichrine*), a play on his family name which means "lion."

But the war's outcome, which saved the honor of the Arab leaders, would have turned out differently had Saudi Arabia and the oil kingdoms of the Arabian Peninsula not intervened decisively. The Israeli army had launched a victorious counteroffensive in which they recrossed the Suez Canal and surrounded Egypt's Third Army. Then they had pushed inland 101 kilometers on the Suez-Cairo route while their armored columns simultaneously rolled into Syria to within forty kilometers of Damascus. These advances were supported by an American military airlift that daily resupplied the Jewish state with arms and munitions. On October 16–17, the Arab oil producing countries, meeting in Kuwait, decided to intervene by raising the price of crude by 70 percent and cutting back monthly production by 5 percent.

They vowed to continue until Israel withdrew from the occupied territories and recognized Palestinian rights. On October 20, King Faisal of Saudi Arabia further announced an embargo on oil shipments to the United States and the Netherlands for supporting Israel.

This would be the decisive weapon that saved face for the Arab leaders on the battlefield, but it had another effect beyond this politico-military episode. It turned the world order upside-down by making the price of oil one of the key global stakes, one which gave extortionate power to those who controlled it. Crude prices quadrupled in a matter of days. This economic pressure had an immediate two-fold effect: it made the Israeli-Arab conflict into a domestic political issue in all oil-importing countries, and it short-circuited the Jewish state's counteroffensive. Sadat and al-Assad had been saved by King Faisal and the oil emirs. Israel accepted the armistice under pressure by the United States and the West, both panicked by the inflationary blows to their economies. Thus, the oil kingdoms were able to consolidate their dominance. Using their rentier wealth made fabulous by the soaring prices, they proceeded to finance the spreading throughout the Sunni world of a hardline conservative ideology based on Saudi Wahhabism. But, once out of the bottle, the genie of jihad was difficult to stuff back in, as they would discover. How they ultimately became its victims we will examine below.

A large part of popular Arab literature dwells on the contrasts between the 1967 defeat and the victory of 1973. It attributes the former to the Nasser regime's unbelief and the latter to the explicit piety shown by waging this war during Ramadan. This gave it the legal cover of a jihad. However, fasting from sunrise to sunset—obligatory during the blessed month—is hardly conducive to military operations. Fortunately, this regimen can be lifted for a jihad, because a community of believers that is weakened risks being wiped out by its enemies, endangering the survival of Islam itself. So that the soldiers could eat and drink during daylight hours, the Egyptian and Syrian ulemas, prompted by the ruling powers, proclaimed that the Ramadan War qualified as jihad. Aside from the instrumental dimension of this fatwa, the confrontation effectively became a jihad, paralleling the global oil initiative that gave the final victory to the oil kingdoms known for their strict Islamic rigor. Other enlightening commentaries along the same lines approvingly commented on the soldiers' battle cry of "*Allahu Akbar!*" in 1973. It helped lead them to victory, whereas the "Land! Air! Sea!" imposed by the unbelieving nationalist regime in 1967 led to an inevitable defeat.

The use of oil as a political weapon during the 1973 war also changed the Saudi-American relationship, which dated back to President Roosevelt and King Ibn Saud. The pair had formalized it on February 14, 1945 on the USS *Quincy* anchored in the Suez Canal. Roosevelt had come straight from Yalta, eager to secure oil supplies in a divided world that was imminent, and would oppose the community of free nations to a Soviet Union endowed with rich Azerbaijani and Siberan oil fields. With this agreement, the United States in effect replaced the United Kingdom, exhausted by World War II, as protector of the Saudi monarchy. In return, the Saudis would let the American firm ARAMCO (Arabian American Oil Company) exploit their country's oil resources. This Valentine's Day pact—always a propitious day for eternal engagements—was the main raison d'être for the American presence in the Middle East. It had priority over the relationship with the Jewish state.

Israel's principal arms supplier before the 1967 war had been France (whose loaned Dassault Mirage warplanes were the key to Israel's victory). During the 1956 Suez expedition, the United States had called on Israel to withdraw its troops from the Sinai, and on the British and French to remove their paratroopers from the Suez Canal. This meant that Israel's interests ranked lower for the United States. It took de Gaulle's refusal to continue arming Tel Aviv to change American minds. He announced as much in his famous press conference of November 27, 1967, in which he criticized the occupation of territories conquered during the Six-Day War. Washington now hastened to take over military assistance to the Israelis, thus reversing the priorities of the Quincy pact by prioritizing Israel's defense over the oil deal.

Consequently, the Saudi side felt that much freer to stick a knife in the contract in October 1973, but also because the rise in the price of crude actually favored the medium-term interests of the Texas oil giants. The Zapata Petroleum Company was one of these, founded in 1953 by the future president George H. W. Bush, through which continued fruitful relationships could be maintained with the United States. However, the changed balance of power in favor of the producers did allow them finally to nationalize the international oil companies in their countries. They could now tap the oil revenues directly instead of having to settle for the royalties the seven multinationals known as the Seven Sisters had dribbled out to them. This only increased the wealth of the petromonarchies and their influence on recasting the Middle East in pursuit of re-Islamizing the regional political order.

Positioning

Spreading Sunni Wahhabite conservative Islam outside Saudi Arabia's borders had been one of the kingdom's key foreign policy priorities. It was designed to counter the missions Nasser sent out from the Islamic Al-Azhar University in Cairo to convince Muslims worldwide of Islam's compatibility with socialism. This competition was a by-product of the Cold War, in which each side tried to enlist the religion in its cause. Crown Prince Faisal founded the Muslim World League on December 15, 1962 in Mecca at the same time as Soviet-trained Egyptian troops landed in Yemen to menace the Saudi frontier. However, before 1973, this organization only played a secondary role in the great ideological conflict between Moscow and Washington, whose vocabulary employed a different register that downgraded religious questions.

With the Nasserite enemy now history, and thanks to the dizzying increase in the per-barrel price of oil, the League had very large sums at its disposal to use in making Saudi influence felt wherever it wished. In the process, this country became the heart of the new Islamic context of meaning for a region and world centered on the Peninsula. What mattered going forward was reinforcing Saudi Arabia's growing hegemony. It also needed to justify, with the help of its charitable and guided patronage, the most intransigent Muslims, that is, the Salafists and other Wahhabis collecting rents as a reward for their extreme religious virtue. However, the Muslim World League refrained from engaging in sectarian squabbles that would have limited its influence. If it made it its task to fight the innovations that deformed the pure and authentic message of the original Islam—a gibe aimed mainly at Sufism—it nonetheless fully accommodated the Muslim Brotherhood. This was because at the time it treated the Brothers as allies in the project of Islamizing societies around the globe. Besides, the Brothers were more knowledgeable than the Saudi ulema establishment about the modern world that was ripe for conversion.

Around this time, the Muslim masses in Europe, most of them immigrant laborers, were severely impacted by widespread unemployment. It was a direct result of the economic crisis in which the quadrupling of the oil price was a major factor. The Muslim World League therefore began opening offices and mosques in Europe during the second half of the 1970s. The goal

was to give structure to the Islamization movement that was starting to surface in these milieus that were experiencing an identity crisis. It grew out of the random resettlement of millions of individuals who hunkered down in their country of immigration while unskilled jobs evaporated.

Egypt, bled dry by its colossal military expenditures and demographic burdens, presented another choice target. However, it was still positioned as a potential pole of opposition to the spread of Wahhabism. This was due to the long, prestigious history of Al-Azhar, where the Sufi brotherhood, despised by the Salafists, remained well represented. The country had to be kept afloat, yet in a state of constant dependency, to exorcise any desire, however weak, for continuing to act as a counterweight to the new Saudi leading role.

Sadat himself had played the Islamization game on his own person. Of course, that was before he was shunned by the Arab world after going to Jerusalem and addressing the Knesset on 20 November 1977. Back then, he even bore the famous *zbiba* ("dry raisin"), the nickname given in Egypt to the brownish callus in the middle of the forehead that identifies the pious faithful. It comes from the believer touching their forehead to the ground when prostrating five times daily during prayers. Sadat had his first name, Mohammed—never used previously—added to his title, to be preceded by his ceremonial praise name. "the President-Believer" (*al-raïs al-mou'min*). Egypt began to sprout immense new mosques, parti-colored with neon, whose loudspeakers turned up to full volume dominated the urban cacophony. Alcohol was prohibited on Egypt Air flights. The Egyptian Muslim Brothers exiled to the Gulf under Nasser were allowed to return to invest their petrodollars in Islamic banks run according to sharia. During the decade of Sadat's presidency, the country's human landscape was also transformed by the mass veiling of Egyptian women.

Collectively, these measures had a preventive purpose. They were designed to get the population, force-fed on anti-Zionist propaganda, to accept the turnabout that the peace treaty concluded with Israel in 1979 constituted. Contrary to expectations, the steps taken did not keep the Islamist opposition from radicalizing. In effect, in the future it would own a fertile cultural breeding ground into which it would sink deep roots. The Islamists would sweep away the "President-Believer," who would be assassinated by the "Organization of Jihad" (*Tanzim al Gihad*) on October 6, 1981 during a military parade celebrating the Egyptian army crossing the

Suez Canal on Yom Kippur eight years earlier. Few tears were shed in Egypt for this unpopular pharaoh, as this author living in Cairo observed firsthand at the time. Among the caustic *nukat* that the humor-loving Egyptians came up with, one of the best-known had a street sweeper cleaning the ground under the presidential tribune the day after Sadat's death. He came upon something on the ground that looked like a raisin: "Hey, what's this now? Ah, yes, it's the president's *zbiba*!" The point of the joke was that the conspicuous mark in the middle of his forehead had, after all, only been glued on.

Lebanon's civil war was another crucial marker in this gradual Islamization of the Middle Eastern context of meaning by recasting the repertoire of political mobilizations into religious categories. Until then, mobilizations had been imprinted by nationalism, sharpened by the centrality of the Palestinian resistance against the "Zionist enemy." They also fit into the global face-off between the Soviet and American blocs. The armed Palestinian presence had been ratified in a secret agreement signed in Cairo on November 3, 1969 between the head of the Lebanese army's general staff and Yasser Arafat. It created a kind of state within a state in the south of Lebanon along the border with Israel.

This is where the Palestinian fighters came after the 1970 Black September massacres in Jordan, as they gradually relocated to Lebanon under guarantee of the Arab states. For them, it was about saving face with their populations by establishing a focal point near Israel from where they could keep pressure on the Israelis through medium-intensity guerrilla warfare. The image of the Resistance was then at its height, much reinforced by the contrast it offered to the lamentable showing by the Arab armies during the Six-Day War. The leftist papers in the Latin Quarter of Paris that I read while in high school during those years carried headlines like, "The Palestinian Resistance will sweep away the Cairo Accords," and "The road to Jerusalem passes through Amman, Beirut, and Cairo." They drew an equivalence between the "Zionist entity" and "the Arab bourgeoisie" in the impending, all-out battle to have socialism reign on earth.

Such grandiose projects of Marxist messianism went nowhere. Instead, Lebanon's fragile confessional balance was upset by introducing an armed movement into it. While it was all Palestinian in its national identity, it fit into the mosaic of the Land of Cedars as a Muslim and Sunni force—in other words, neither Christian nor Shia. The Maronites, for which the French

under the League of Nations Mandate had created Lebanon after World War I, letting many achieve middle class status, had seen their numbers decline in proportion to the country's overall population. Then, there were the Shiite masses: impoverished and marginalized, their hefty birthrate had translated into a huge rural exodus and the creation of an immense disinherited suburb (*banlieue*) in south Beirut.

During the first half of the 1970s—before the Iranian Revolution of 1978–1979 heightened the denominational identity of Shiism as distinct from Sunnism—the Shiites were lumped in politically with Muslims. They were thus regarded by the Sunni elite, on the whole, as part of their flock, from which the prime minister was chosen (the president of the Republic, who then wielded executive power, was a Maronite, as required by the Lebanese constitution). In that context, implanting the Palestinian armed organizations strengthened the hand of the Sunni and of Muslims generally. This let them exert pressure for reforming the political system to their benefit and to the detriment of the Christians. In reality, the Palestinians who had settled close to the border with Israel in the South of Lebanon maintained a complex relationship with the Shiite majority there.

In the mid-1970s, Arafat's lieutenant Abu Jihad had helped to found the first Shiite political organizations, including Amal, or the Movement of the Disinherited, led by Imam Musa al-Sadr. Nevertheless, the tensions were palpable. There were disputes over land and over Israel's indiscriminate bombing of the Lebanese South in retaliation for the Palestinian katyusha rocket attacks from the area. In 1978, during the Iranian Revolution, Arafat offered his organization's help to Khomeini, then requested fatwas from him on behalf of the "Palestinian revolution" for tamping down the tensions with Lebanon's Shiite populations. Nevertheless, when the Israeli attacks became more generalized, starting in 1972, the overall relationship between the Lebanese state, including its Christian component, and the Palestinians deteriorated.

The combination of these factors explains why civil war broke out on April 13, 1975, when a bus carrying Palestinians was attacked by Phalangist (Maronite) militias, resulting in twenty-seven deaths. The response by the Islamo-progressive side, in which the determining factor was the firepower of the Palestinian organizations, let it gain the upper hand militarily, initially with Syrian support. But in June 1976, Hafez al-Assad sent his army into Lebanon to restore equilibrium under his control.

Syria's occupation of Lebanese territory would persist for nearly three decades, until April 2005.

There were many twists and turns in the Lebanese civil war. First came the Israeli invasion of the South in 1978, from which they moved north to take all of Lebanon, up to the capital's southern suburb from 1982 until 1985. Next came the taking of Western hostages and the fratricidal conflicts between Christian factions. But for purposes of the present narrative, two major developments stand out. The first was the creation of Hezbollah in late 1982, and its official recognition in 1985. Instigated by the Islamic Republic, this Shiite party would come to dominate Lebanon's political life three decades later, after it took over resistance against Israel from the PLO. The other development was the Taif Agreement signed in Saudi Arabia in 1989. It sealed the political defeat of the Christians by shifting the center of executive power from the Maronite president toward the Sunni prime minister. The main beneficiary of this maneuver was the Lebanese-Saudi billionaire Rafic Hariri, who would occupy the latter office repeatedly starting in 1992. He would reconstruct Beirut's devastated downtown with the Solidere project to jumpstart the economy. That is, until he was assassinated there on February 14, 2005 as his motorcade rolled through the urban space that bore his imprint.

Lebanon's apparent tilt into the Sunni-dominated world was manifested in raising the immense Hariri Mosque on the demarcation line between the capital's Christian and Muslim zones. This was the district of the ancient souks, ravaged by the fighting during the civil war. The mosque rose next to the antique Maronite cathedral, overwhelming it with its bulk. Ironically, the Taif Accords, though explicitly marginalizing the Christians to the benefit of the Muslims, was really a vain Sunni attempt to block the surging Shiite community. The Shiites were now the largest demographic in the country, strongly supported and armed by Iran through Hezbollah. As observers, it is immediately incumbent on us to understand the logic of how a Shiite power could emerge ready to compete with Saudi Arabia in the Islamic context of meaning. It matters, because the outcome of the Syrian civil war in 2018 is one of its consequences. We begin by putting into perspective the events of the pivotal year 1979 that started with Khomeini's return from exile to Teheran in February. Then came the signing of the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt in Washington in March, and the assault on the Mecca Grand Mosque in November. On Christmas, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, which would set off the Sunni jihad in that country.

1979, a Pivotal Year: One-Upmanship Between Shiites and Sunnis

Like the other oil producers, Iran had profited handsomely from the price rise of crude, even if, as a non-Arab country, it had no hand in imposing the embargo of October 1973. But, in its wake, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi upped the ante, seeing in the quadrupling of prices a chance to make his country one of the world's great powers. He announced immense ambitions in the advertising pages of the international press, took a share in Eurodif, the European nuclear agency, in the process worrying his Gulf neighbors that he was out to dominate the region. Pahlavi's megalomania had been on display in the sumptuous celebrations at Persepolis in October 1971 when he spent billions of dollars in honor of the two thousand five hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Persian empire's—to which he claimed to be the heir.

However, the principal beneficiaries of the explosive increase in oil prices were his cronies, the army, and the state apparatus, to the detriment of the larger civil society that his police repressed violently. The alienation of the traditional middle classes, embodied by the bazaar merchants, as well as the Shiite clergy that came out of them, set the stage for a grave social crisis. The situation was aggravated by the inflow of peasants attracted to the cities in the vain hope of benefiting from the oil bonanza. They ended up forming an immense proletariat of the disinherited. In this context, even many of the tens of thousands of scholarship recipients the shah sent abroad to be educated for the Iran of the future turned against an autocratic and corrupt imperial regime

The shah visited the United States in November 1977, while President Jimmy Carter was trying to "moralize" American foreign policy after his disgraced predecessor Richard Nixon. He was greeted with violent demonstrations by students and activists, mostly Marxists and progressives. They had invaded the Washington Mall, and the tear gas used to disperse them drifted on the wind to the White House Rose Garden. It forced the monarch to break off his remarks as he was being broadcast live on radio and TV, his eyes streaming with tears. The symbolic effect of these images cracked the authoritarian façade. It encouraged the Iranian opposition to speak up, the more so since the American demands for respecting human rights tempered the repression that followed.

However, just as would be the case in Algeria in 1988, or during the Arab uprisings in early 2010, religious forces kneaded the leftist or democratic yeast into the revolutionary dough. They ended up coopting this movement and diverting it for their own purposes. The modernizing autocrats in neighboring Arab countries had tarnished secularism in the service of dictatorship, compromising the legitimacy of a democratic opposition that appropriated these same ideals for the sake of authenticity. Pahlavi Iran had encouraged dispersing its opposition, using the communist movement as one pole and the most politicized Shiite clergy as the other.

Baffling as it might seem, despite the professed atheism of the communists, these two currents in a sense were structurally similar. Like the Leninists, the Shiite clergy were hierarchical and skilled at relaying slogans and mobilizing their flock. This contrasted sharply with the Sunni world, where religious authority was fragmented between multiple competing ulemas. Hence, this was a precious asset for organizing a revolutionary movement with sufficient staying power to topple the strongman. This congruence was further reflected in numerous hybrid Islamic-Marxist or Islamic-Leftist groups. The best known were the People's Mujahideen, an appellation that combined the notion of jihad with populism.

Credit for this ideological crossbreed belonged to Ali Shariati, an intellectual from a religious family, later educated in France in the Latin Quarter of Paris. In his translation of French Caribbean psychiatrist Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*—then a beacon of thirld-worldist ideology—Shariati had adapted the celebrated Marxist contradiction between oppressed and oppressors using Koranic vocabulary. He rendered the first term as "disinherited" (*mostadafin*) and the second as "arrogants" (*mostakbirin*). However, this adaptation did not preserve the categories of the original. By adding a strong moral meaning imbued with religiosity, he made it possible to move the lines separating opposing social classes. It meant that the metacategory of the disinherited could run the gamut of the shah's opponents. As we have seen, these ranged from the bazaar merchants to the proletariat born of the rural exodus. They included the pious middle classes and the poor urban youth who, from a strictly social perspective, should have been antagonists. Under the leadership of clerics that shared the same ideology, they all fused now in the revolutionary process.

This was the achievement of the political genius of Ayatollah Khomeini, an opponent of the shah exiled to Najaf, the Shiite holy city in Iraq.

He lived there from 1964 to 1978, then, after Iraq expelled him, at Neauphle-le-Château on the outskirts of Paris. He returned to Teheran on February 1, 1979, seizing the opportunity of making himself the champion of the disinherited. This was the route by which he came to control a clerical apparatus that did not support him initially. He also managed to make a tool of the leftist opposition—until he neutralized it after he had triumphed and proclaimed his "Islamic Republic."

To help accomplish this, he returned to a fundamentalist, purified form of Shiite dogma, a process that Salafism also went through in the Sunni world. It involved stripping the faith of all the compromises made over the centuries between ayatollahs and princes. Under his doctrine, the Imam Husayn Ibn Ali, grandson of the Prophet, martyred at Karbala in October 680 by soldiers of the Sunni caliph Yazid, represented the sublime incarnation of the disinherited. The shah, on the other hand, personified the arrogant Yazid. By telescoping the foundations of his ideologically revised dogma with present issues, Khomeini succeeded in creating a formidable mobilizing force. It would overcome not only all the other components of the opposition but also the imperial regime.

Khomeini, who from now on would let himself be addressed as the "Guide" of the Islamic Revolution, thus returned triumphantly to Teheran on an Air France plane. Stepping onto the tarmac, he incarnated a particularly powerful competitive force within the Islamization of the Middle East. This was the process set in motion by Saudi Arabia and its allies six years earlier at the time of the Ramadan War and the quadrupling of crude prices. The antagonism between these two entities would become the principal engine of crises and conflicts within and outside the region during the next four decades. It would especially affect Europe through the recurring export of Islamist terrorism to its soil, making hostages of the immigrant populations from Muslim backgrounds living there.

In line with how the price of a barrel of crude fluctuated, the tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia ended up even relativizing the principal faultline that had crystallized Arab nationalism after the independences, namely the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation. It, too, would be annexed to the Sunni-Shiite conflict's own logics (as Lebanese Hezbollah and the Palestinian Hamas would demonstrate by taking it over, both under Teheran's influence). The antagonism's dynamic was one of continuing escalation, at the cost of constantly aggravating the chaos roiling Middle East

societies. Its genesis lay in the political irresponsibility induced by the sustained effects of oil revenues that continued to grow, seemingly without an end in sight, until the second half of the 2010 decade.

The Iranian Revolution posed a considerable challenge for Saudi Arabia and its allies, for it relativized the impact of a Sunni-style Islamization process that lacked both social dynamics and heroism. The knitting together by the oil emirs of an associational international Salafist network was not enough of a counterfire to contain the enthusiasm triggered spontaneously by the Iranian revolutions in the Sunni working-class strata. This was so despite the financial support that most of the emirs provided during this period to the international Muslim Brotherhood.

It was all the more problematic because Khomeinist discourse simultaneously called out two global enemies. First, he railed against the American "Great Satan" (and, concurrently, the French "Little Satan" as an accessory—despite the hospitality shown Khomeini at Neauphle-le-Château). Second, he condemned the collective oil kingdoms of the Arabian Peninsula as mere lackeys of the United States. In targeting the first, in line with Shariati's ideas, he subscribed to a global Third-Worldist movement which allowed him to transcend the exclusively religious dimension. This stance earned him plaudits from as far away as Latin America with its tiny Muslim populations. By training his sights on the second, Khomeini sought to transcend his relatively narrow Persian and Shiite bases (which represent only about 15 percent of the world's Muslims). In both instances, his objective was to snatch the leadership of global Islam from the Saudi Arabian rulers, known as the "Custodians of the Two Holy Mosques" for their control over the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, which is one of the five pillars of Islam.

The American-Saudi response to the Iranian Revolution was one of the components of the global politics of jihad in Afghanistan. The opportunity came with retaliation for the Soviet Army's invading the country on Christmas 1979, the pivotal year that had started off with Khomeini's return to Teheran on February 1. The year continued with the Egypt-Israel peace treaty of March 26 —which saw the front line shift from the Near East and the eastern Mediterranean toward the Persian Gulf and Central Asia.

The arrival of the Soviet Army paratroopers and tanks in Kabul upset the equilibrium established following World War II. It thus differed from

the Soviet interventions in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. These had still fit into the framework of the division of the world following the Yalta Conference, and so forestalled any military response by the free world. Leonid Brezhnev felt compelled to intervene in Afghanistan in 1979 because, by Soviet logic, the power of the local communists had to be secured against imminent peril. The country's mostly tribal and rural society, very attached to traditional ways generally, was revolting against the policy of promoting atheism.

As for the White House, it could not accept this latest setback, coming on the heels of America's defeat in Vietnam four years earlier and the loss of its Iranian ally in early 1979. The shah had played a considerable geopolitical role as policeman of the Gulf in guarding the area's gigantic oil reserves against Russian acquisitive appetites. Moreover, the United States had just suffered an unprecedented humiliation with the hostage taking at the American embassy in Teheran by the so-called Student Followers of the Imam's Line. The crisis began on November 4, and an attempt to free the hostages had met with total failure. Moreover, the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan clearly breached the Yalta agreement. The country sharing a border with Iran, where the local communists of the Tudeh party were active members of the revolutionary forces (Khomeini would not purge them until the following year), also revived for the Americans the specter of Moscow salient to the "warm oceans". It was a contemporary version of the nineteenth century's Anglo-Russian "Great Game" in southwest Asia.

Finally, in the distinctive Islamic worldview, the end of 1979 saw a drama of paramount symbolic significance unfold. November 20 marked the first day of the fifteenth century of the Hegira calendar. Doctrine held that every hegiric century would see the coming of a reviver (*Muhi*) or messiah (*Mahdi*) of Islam to reestablish purity by confronting worldly deviance. Against this background, a band of Saudi radical jihadists led by Juhayman al-Otaybi seized the Grand Mosque of Mecca. Al-Otaybi belonged to one of the country's great tribes and opposed the corruption of the Saudi royal family, which he faulted for being too connected to the West. He also wanted to have his brother-in-law Abdullah al-Qahtani acknowledged as the messiah of the new hegiric century.

Al-Otaybi had ties with the most unbending fringes of the kingdom's Salafist establishment. He circulated some epistles in which, thirty years later, it would be possible to find a considerable amount of what inspired

the Islamic State of ISIS. It took two weeks to restore order in Mecca, and not until a French gendarmerie SWAT team (GIGN) had retaken the Mosque by assault. Its mission was kept secret at the time, because non-Muslims are forbidden (*haram*)from entering the sacred grounds. Thousands of pilgrims were held hostage and 244 people were killed (the 117 assailants among them)—even though any spilling of blood is prohibited in the Grand Mosque. The affair embarrassed the Saudi king, who was paralyzed by the shock for the first few days. Here he had been outflanked by someone even more Wahhabist and jihadist than himself, and in the very process of Islamizing the region that he had launched at that. The king had proved incapable of keeping Islamic order in the Holy Mosques. This called into question his claim to be their custodian and, by extension, his unilateral claim to supremacy over global Islam.

The Soviet Army entering Kabul barely three weeks after the calamitous retaking of the Mecca *haram* represented another challenge to Saudi aspirations for leadership of the Muslim world. In effect, in the doctrinal geography of Islam, this act of war could be interpreted as an invasion of a land of Islam (*dar al-Islam*) by infidels (*kuffar*). Muslim rulers were bound by the Holy Scriptures to retaliate by calling for, and immediately launching, a mandatory armed jihad to repel the invader—or risk losing legitimacy. First and foremost the Saudi monarch who claimed worldwide Islamic leadership and guidance.

The Soviet invasion could therefore be read in two complementary ways. Seen from Washington, it was a vexing Cold War episode that called for a response. With its long, slow defeat in Vietnam and the humiliation in Iran, the United States risked losing its superpower status. From Riyadh's perspective, it was virtually forced to declare a jihad, especially since the Saudi monarchy aspired to hegemony over global Islam. This was the term chosen to describe the insurrectional guerrilla force equipped and trained by the CIA and cofinanced by petrodollars from the Arabian Peninsula. Its guerrillas, christened Freedom Fighters on the other side of the Atlantic, were so many men with beards for whom "freedom" meant applying sharia once the Soviets were kicked out of the land of Islam.

This confused vocabulary witnessed profoundly to the semantic Islamization of what would become the last battle of the Cold War. It would also be the first of the Islamic wars of the modern era—whether we call them jihad, raid (*ghazu*), lawful terrorism (*irhab mashruʿ*), or martyrdom operation

(*ʿamaliyya istish.hadiyya*). Eventually, the Soviet Army withdrew from Kabul on February 15, 1989 and the next shoe dropped with the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9. Once the USSR had dissolved, the conflict between the Islamist East and the secular West (labeled "impious," "Jewish-crusader," and so on) took the place of the struggle between the communist East and capitalist West.

The Afghan jihad killed two birds with one stone. First, it delivered the final blow to the USSR, exposing the debilitated Soviet Army as a paper tiger. The deep reasons for the failure of the Soviet system varied and traced back farther in time. They included an arms race with the United States that ruined the USSR's economy and policymakers who ignored the functional flaws inherent in the planned economy versus the free market. Regardless, finishing off the USSR would earn the jihadists immense prestige among their fellow Muslims. They would use it to assert themselves on a global level as a previously unknown type of terrorist military force to which bin Laden gave a face. Also, in the Islamic symbolic order, the Sunni jihad victory for now served to counter Khomeinist propaganda—it cast the Saudis and their allies as the saviors of a Muslim country invaded by the atheists in the Kremlin. As we will see, this was met by a novel response from Teheran. It involved relegating the victory to the background by saturating the media landscape with news of the fatwa condemning Salman Rushdie to death. It was cannily sprung on the world on the eve of the Soviet retreat from Afghanistan. The ensuing sensational global coverage all but drowned out news of the Soviet Army withdrawal from Kabul, pulling a Persian carpet under the feet of Washington and Riyad and frustrating them symbolically of their military success.

TWO

The Onset of International Jihad

Taking on the Near Enemy (1980–1987)

The Struggle to Control Islamization in the 1980s

Besides the Afghan jihad, the 1980s saw both the constantly progressing Islamization of the Middle Eastern political order and the sharpening of antagonisms between the Shiite and Sunni camps intent on controlling it. The main conflict was the Iran-Iraq war that lasted from 1980 to August 1988. Unleashed by Saddam Hussein and supported by Western powers to contain an expansionist Iranian Revolution, it caused an estimated one million deaths. It was also a chance for the Iranian Revolutionary Guards (*Pasdaran*) and *Basij* ("the mobilized") to test the tactic of suicide attacks, called "martyr operations" by their silent sponsors. These methods would spread, first to Lebanon and Israel, then throughout the Middle East, Europe, America, and around the world.

Teheran opened secondary fronts via the Lebanese civil war and Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which were no less important. The ensuing hostility set Iran both against the West and its allies, and against most Sunni organizations—except for Hamas, as we shall see. In effect, the Islamic Republic led a proxy war in the Levant to defend itself against the coalition of its enemies and relieve the pressure on its own borders with Iraq and on the Persian Gulf seaboard. It then opened a third front in Europe (which was intrinsically linked to Lebanon due to a hostage situation that occurred there) where the attacks skyrocketed. Until Khomeini's death in

June 1989, the country he guided totally discarded the rules of conventional warfare and international law while it probed for chinks in its adversaries' armor. It hit them with the Rushdie fatwa, suicide attacks, and the taking of hostages to force acquiescence and dissuade them from direct military threats. Once Iran had regained a sense of security with the end of the Iraq war, it began to draw closer again to the community of nations. It felt compelled to emerge from an isolation that had threatened the regime's continued existence. Meanwhile, Iran's operating mode had found imitators in Sunni jihadist circles. They perpetuated throughout the world an Iran-style terrorism that the Republic had invented. Indeed, unlike the Shiite version, Sunni terrorism did not rely on the centralized apparatus of a state that would end up reintegrating to some extent with the international institutional order.

The Sunni containment of the Iranian Revolution thus proceeded along two principal axes: Afghan and Iraqi, which relied on jihad and Saddam Hussein respectively. Both benefited from unswerving Western support—which, in hindsight, appears to have been a rather shortsighted strategy.

In the Afghan jihad, mainly directed against the USSR, the objective was to build a "Great Narrative" as an alternative to the imagined Third Worlder, belligerent and revolutionary, that was at the heart of Teheran's propaganda. Saudi Arabia and its allies wanted to show that they could respond better to the principal contemporary challenge posed to Islam, i.e., the invasion of its territory by the Soviet atheists. In the Islamic imagination, it was parallel to the occupation of Palestine by Israel, and remained the cause of a decaying Arab nationalism—until it was Islamized in turn by the emergence of Hamas toward the decade's end. Hence, the call went out for the world's Muslims to mobilize and rescue their Afghan coreligionists. The Salafists of the Arabian Peninsula and the Muslim Brotherhood joined in a chorus that soon swelled with all the political tendencies of Sunni Islam. It called for challenging the Shiites for hegemony over this global-scale religion.

The principal ideologue of Sunni jihad in the 1980s was, in fact, a Palestinian Muslim Brother, Abdullah Azzam, who was living in Peshawar, the Pakistani frontier town converted into a staging point for operations in Afghanistan. That made it the gateway into the battlefield for military supplies, as well as a hub for jihadists who came from everywhere to set up their base camps (*Qaeda* in Arabic—from which the main jihadist organization took its name). In his manifesto titled *Join the caravan!*, Azzam outlined

the obligation incumbent on Muslims the world over to fight in Afghanistan. He claimed they were required to do so in the name of "defensive jihad," which called on every believer to mobilize for the reconquest of the land of Islam under attack by infidels. This duty takes precedence over everything; neither a state, nor a husband, wife, father, or slave's master could stand in the way of one performing it. Every believer had to act within his or her capabilities "by the hand, the tongue or the heart," which could mean taking part in battle, financing, exhorting or preaching, or, at the very least, praying. Azzam asserted that this duty is an "individual obligation" (*fard ʿayn*) based on the Holy Scriptures; the worst punishment would be meted out in the hereafter to those who ignored it. The text and the many articles he penned in the ad hoc review *Al-Jihad* echoed a fatwa by the senior Sunni ulemas of the Salafist and Muslim Brotherhood movements calling on the world's Muslims to join the fight. Recruiting offices were opened not only in Muslim countries but also in the West, including in the United States. Azzam was on good terms with the CIA, which, in fact, organized his tour of American Islamic centers. He set up the Bureau of Services (*Maktab al-Khidamat*—MAK) to coordinate the recruitment, funding, and routing of foreign jihadists. His main office in the United States in Brooklyn would later be a hangout for many Islamists, including the blind Egyptian sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, who was eventually sentenced to life in prison for the first attack on the World Trade Center in 1993. As for MAK, it would be taken over by Osama bin Laden after Azzam's assassination in November 1989 and incorporated into the al-Qaeda organization.

Financing the ten-year Afghan jihad is estimated to have cost the United States four billion dollars, and a matching sum in Arabian Peninsula petrodollars. At the time, it seemed a paltry price to pay for finishing off the USSR. But, in hindsight, the ultimate cost of this deal with the devil was incalculable, for it included the second attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001.

The crucial military ground combat operations were carried out by Afghans called "mujahideen"—the active past participle of an Arab term that means "fighters of jihad." Some colleagues and I (in my 2000 book *Jihad*) then coined the new word "jihadists" by adding a Greco-Latin suffix to the Arab root. It served to distinguish some forty thousand foreigners who flocked to the ranks of the native guerrilla fighters from the latter. They came from North Africa—especially Algeria, Libya, and Egypt—and

from the Arabian Peninsula, Pakistan, and as far away as Malaysia and the south Philippines. Among them were Muslims who had emigrated to the United States, and a few dozen had already come from the European banlieues. They were trained and equipped by the CIA, but did relatively little fighting in-country. Those jihadists returning to their homes would recycle their training during the following decade to wage jihads, especially in Algeria and Egypt, or they would enlist in the shadowy al-Qaeda complex.

Algeria and Egypt in particular had to deal with strong Islamist agitation—Sadat had been assassinated on October 6, 1981—and their leaders, anxious to get rid of troublemakers, made it easy for local activists they could not keep in jail to leave the country. (This was the case with the Egyptian physician, Ayman al-Zawahiri, bin Laden's right-hand man and later successor, who left his Cairo prison cell for Peshawar via Saudi Arabia.) Several years later, this myopic strategy backfired when the jihadists returned home, spoiling for a fight. But during the 1980s it fostered the illusion that Islamist activism under the Saudi aegis could be channeled against the USSR and that any eventual disruptions would be mere trifles.

This worldview was held in particular by President Carter's national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, the prime architect of American support for the Afghan jihad. He defended his approach in an interview with the French weekly *Le Nouvel Observateur* on January 15, 1998:

You have no regrets today?

> Regret what? This secret operation was an excellent idea. It was effective in drawing the Russians into the Afghan trap, and you want to know if I regret it? The day the Soviets officially crossed the frontier, I wrote President Carter, saying in essence: "We now have a chance to give the USSR its Vietnam war." In fact, Moscow for nearly ten years had to pursue a war the regime could not afford, a conflict that brought the demoralization and finally the break-up of the Soviet empire.

You do not regret having fostered Islamist fundamentalism, having armed and advised future terrorists?

> What is more important for world history? The Taliban or the fall of the Soviet empire? A few hot-headed Islamists or the liberations of Eastern Europe and the end of the Cold War?

A few hotheads? But let us say it once more: Islamic fundamentalism today represents a global threat.

Nonsense. They say that the West ought to have a global policy for dealing with Islamism. That's stupid: there is no global Islamism.

Freeing Poland from the Russian yoke understandably would have had priority for the Warsaw-born squire turned presidential aide. But Brzezinski's inability as late as 1998 to conceive of "global Islam" sheds light on how America's leaders saw the world. As the 1980s dawned, they failed to comprehend either the significance of the Sunni policy of Islamization, driven by the Saudi monarchy, or its modalities. And the United States had even less of a notion as to how Iran would respond to the strategy of financially exhausting the USSR with the war in Afghanistan, because intellectually they remained prisoners of the Cold War legacy.

The Soviets pulled out of Kabul on February 15, 1989 under pressure from the mujahideen, who had devastated Soviet air power with Stinger ground-to-air missiles supplied by the CIA. In effect, the Soviets' retreat prefigured the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9 of that year, which, in turn, presaged the collapse of the Communist world. For the international jihadists in-country, who had read the history of the world in the light of the prophetic revelation and conquests of Islam (*Futuhat*), there was no doubt that they had reincarnated the deeds of the Prophet and his Companions and immediate successors. This was the "new Koranic generation" (*jîl qurʾani jadid*), which Sayyid Qutb had termed the fulfillment of his vows to destroy the *jahiliyya*—the impious "barbarity" of secular societies. Just like the knights riding under the Prophet's banner had defeated the Sassanid empire at the battle of Qadisiyyah in 636, so had the jihadists beaten the Soviet superpower at Kabul. (It would later come to light that Saddam Hussein had also named his September 1980 offensive against Iran "Qadisiyyah.") Bin Laden and his followers then carried the parallel further. Like the Arabs and Ottomans stepped up their raids against Byzantium, their era's other formidable empire, until it fell in 1453, al-Qaeda escalated their anti-American attacks to climax in the "blessed double raid" against New York and Washington D.C. on September 11, 2001. This sort of transhistorical telescoping is furthered here by the numerology that the Islamist movement is partial to. Seen through that lens, 11/9 (November 9, 1989),

the date the Berlin Wall fell, is emblematic of the end of communism and the East-West split. Its reverse, 9/11 (September 11, 2001), heralds the dawn of the new Christian century. In the eyes of the jihadists, on this day the sun rose on the triumphal, salvational Islamist millennium over the rubble of the impious West.

On February 15, 1989, the world barely paid attention to the Soviet withdrawal from Kabul, robbing the Sunni axis of its moment of glory as Islam's global jihad champion awash in petrodollars from the Arabian Peninsula. The day before, Khomeini had issued his fatwa condemning Salman Rushdie to death for having "blasphemed the Prophet" with his novel *The Satanic Verses*. In one masterstroke, the ayatollah stole the thunder of his rivals' very real geopolitical victory, transferring the fight to the media battlefield. This was in effect the Islamic Republic demonstrating to the planet's billion Muslims that it could issue a fatwa with global reach for the Indian-born British author. By doing so, Khomeini claimed to be standing up for them against the "humiliation inflicted on Mohammed."

This maneuver constituted a symbolic rupture, with effects on several levels. The scandal bewildered the West and garnered massive media attention, so that the Soviet Army's pull-out from Kabul the next day was covered as a mere sidestory. The campaign against Rushdie's novel had actually started six months earlier in the United Kingdom's Indo-Pakistani Sunni Islamist circles. It had already reverberated so much in the Indian subcontinent's Muslim networks that even the secular New Delhi government censored the book. In London, demonstrations demanding similar measures under the anti-blasphemy law had been organized. (The law, since abrogated, only applied to the Anglican Church.)

In January, the rundown industrial city of Bradford in the Midlands, which had a considerable unemployed immigrant Muslim population, had seen the novel burned. Assorted mullahs and association leaders had fed copies of the book affixed to sticks into a bonfire. A furious crowd of believers, gathered on the grandiose square in front of the Gothic Venetian–style city hall, a witness to the bygone splendor of the Industrial Age, cheered them on. Saudi Arabia, who had allied with the United Kingdom and the United States in Afghanistan, had hoped to keep the situation from escalating to avoid offending Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's government, which was livid over the affair. This provided an exceptional political opening for Teheran. By taking over the "defense of the Prophet" mantle from a Saudi Arabia

shirking its duty, Teheran enhanced its standing with the Sunni masses. As an Iranian ayatollah creating an unprecedented scandal in the West by mocking its cherished freedom of speech, Khomeini succeeded in diverting everyone's attention from the joint American-Saudi success in Kabul.

In retrospect, the Rushdie fatwa set several precedents. First, it turned the entire planet into a "land of Islam," the Muslim designation of a territory where sharia applies. If a fatwa could sentence a British citizen and resident to death, it therefore covered the United Kingdom, the West, and the rest of the world. Khomeini's coup in the global mass-media era erased the traditional boundaries of Muslim cosmography and annexed the entire universe to his own juridico-religious enterprise. At the time, there was not sufficient perspective to understand the considerable symbolic importance of this tilt in the Islamization of global norms and values. Even today, after three decades, it is still underestimated. Still, it set a precedent that would be replicated during subsequent "blasphemy" affairs. First, there was the murder of filmmaker Theo van Gogh, shot and stabbed by a Dutch Moroccan youth in Amsterdam on November 2, 2004 for his ten-minute video *Submission*. Then came the campaign against the publication of the "Muhammad cartoons" by the Danish daily *Jyllands Posten* on September 30, 2005. It was followed by the massacre in the *Charlie Hebdo* editorial offices in Paris on January 7, 2015 by the Kuachi brothers, who shouted, "We have avenged the Prophet Mohammed!" The Shiites may have initiated the tactic, but the standard they set exploded beyond its initial limits when the Sunnis began turning it to their own ends.

The fatwa had another effect on the Sunni jihadists: it convinced them that the media battlefield was essential and that they had neglected it during the Afghan jihad. Ayman al-Zawahiri, in his al-Qaeda strategic manifesto, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, published online in the late 1990s, underscored its central importance. He also drew up a qualified balance sheet of the jihads in Bosnia, Algeria, and Egypt, critiquing them as too localized, which kept them from setting off the worldwide reverberations that might have galvanized them and brought victory. In this sense, the lessons derived from the fatwa of February 14, 1989, as *modus operandi*, had another decisive influence. It set the mold for the Hollywoodesque staging of 9/11 in the era of satellite TV transmission, specifically by Al Jazeera. It would also do so—particularly in the social media era to come—for the Islamic State's graphic footage of hostage executions.

Complementing the Afghan jihad, three great conflicts shook the 1980s. They bore witness, on the one hand, to political Islamization joining the major world narratives; on the other hand, they reflected the gamesmanship between Shiites and Sunni as they vied for hegemony over the process.

The Iraq-Iran war was started in September 1980 by Saddam Hussein, a native of Tikrit in Iraq's "Sunni Arab triangle." The conflict forced the Baath party to sideline the secularism that was one of its founding principles and in its place operationalize the precepts of the region's ideological Islamization, in doing so usurping the place of a secular Arab nationalism that was on its last legs. The slogan of *Allahu Akbar* ("Allah is the Greatest") was added to the Iraqi flag in 1990. Saddam had himself filmed everywhere at prayer. The female leaders in the party's hierarchy, who proudly wore their hair like modern militants emancipated from all outdated traditions, had to carefully veil themselves again.

As we saw earlier, the offensive against the Islamic Republic had been baptized "Saddam's Qadisiyyah," thus resurrecting the name of the decisive battle waged in 636 by the forces of Caliph Omar, the Prophet's second successor, who destroyed the Persian empire and annexed it to the land of Islam. Saddam Hussein tried to wrap himself in the Islamic referent. He wanted to deprive his adversary of it, reducing Iran to its ancient Sassanide and Zoroastrian territorial origins, thus hamstringing its claim to represent all of Islam. Not to be outdone, Teheran roundly denounced Baathist secularism for making a sham of the religion. For internal use, the Iranian military offensives were named "Karbala" (numbered from one in 1981 to six in 1988) to rally its soldiers with the Shiite ideology as updated by Khomeini. State propaganda routinely depicted Saddam as a reincarnation of the Umayyad Caliph Yazid, the slayer of Imam Hussein at the battle of Karbala in the year 680. Internationally, i.e., for the world's Muslims at large, other campaigns were called "Badr," the name of the first battle won by the Prophet in 624 against the *kuffar* ("unbelievers") of the Quraysh tribe—another stand-in for the "unbelieving" Baathists.

Saddam's motivations were twofold, domestic and international. At home, his bloody dictatorial regime was becoming fabulously rich from the rise in the price of crude oil. Iraq at the time was the second-largest exporter in the world after Saudi Arabia. Beyond the Baathist window dressing, he relied on one of Iraq's minorities, the Sunni Arabs. Confronting them was a Shiite majority (the principal holy places of that sect, Karbala and Najaf,

are located in Iraq) and the irredentist Kurds dwelling in the mountains in the country's north where they waged a low-level guerrilla war. Saddam had two key tasks: first, counter the potential attraction that the political Shiism of the Islamic Republic held for the majority of his own people. The other was to profit from the revolutionary disorder in the neighboring country by expanding into the east. He wanted to lengthen the 36-mile Iraqi coastline fronting the Persian Gulf and planned to accomplish this by annexing the Arab-speaking Iranian maritime province of Khuzestan.

In regional and international terms, Iraq was the secular fist of all those who wanted to block the Khomeinist expansion and proselytizing. This included the Sunni oil monarchies on the Arabian Peninsula that united against Iran in 1981 in a Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (better known as the Gulf Cooperation Council or GCC). Then there were the Western powers, foremost the United States and France. Ignoring Saddam's abysmal record of human rights violations, the political and oil elites of both countries held him in high esteem. He had established close relations with Jacques Chirac as well as parts of the French secular left. He benefited from highly sophisticated American and French weapons in his war against Iran, including the loan of the French Navy's "Super Étendard" fighter-bombers. This military assistance is one of the reasons Iran cited for their retaliating by taking Western hostages, operations carried out by Teheran's proxies in Lebanon. But these operations failed to offset Iraq's arms advantage, which eventually tilted the fortunes of war in Baghdad's favor.

* * *

To avoid a debacle, Ayatollah Khomeini was forced to "drink from the poisoned chalice," that is, accept a ceasefire between the two countries, both bled dry by the fighting, effective August 20, 1988. He tried to divert attention from this failure by "moving ahead" with the fatwa against Rushdie the following February 14, before dying on June 3, 1989 at nearly 87 years of age. The charismatic imam's death created the necessary condition for the Islamic Republic to gradually rejoin the community of nations. As for Saddam Hussein, his victory by default left him at the head of a ravaged country, ruined and deeply in debt to the Arab petromonarchies. This is why he gambled on attacking his Kuwaiti creditor in August 1990, plunging Iraq into the first Gulf war. For both Iraq and Iran, the oil revenues had fed

an exorbitant war-making capacity, especially in Saddam's case, with the stockpiling of weapons facilitated by the Western powers. It had also widened the split between Shiites and Sunnis to extremes that went beyond even the military confrontation between Persians and Arabs.

Simultaneously, the Islamic Republic, bent on loosening the stranglehold on its borders and airspace, spread the conflict to the Levant by proxy. It penetrated weak spots that both the ongoing Lebanese civil war and the evolution of Israeli-Palestinian hostilities had revealed. The 1980s, in effect, were marked as much by the Islamization of the vocabulary of these two conflicts as by Iran infiltrating them with its interests, conspicuously in Lebanon and gradually, below the radar, in Palestine. This provided Teheran with unexpected, potent leverage for pressuring the Western camp.

In Lebanon, this strategy first played out in hostage taking. It was paralleled by Hezbollah's mobilizing of Lebanon's Shiite community, demographically in the majority but marginalized politically, now transformed into a dominant force. The Shiite community succeeded in uniting around itself all the minorities making up the Levantine mosaic. This included the Eastern Christians who faced extermination from the propagation of jihadist Salafism, of which Islamic State would become the most extreme expression. And, operating from the Shiite districts in South Lebanon, Hezbollah de facto replaced the Palestinian resistance against Israel with its own "Resistance" (*Muqawama*). It combined this with support for Hamas in a rare example of a Sunni Islamist movement linked to the Muslim Brotherhood aligning with Teheran.

In a bruised and divided Lebanon, heavily influenced by Damascus since the Syrian troops arrived in June 1976, the Palestinians settled in the south were in the habit of launching rocket barrages at Israel's Galilee. To put a stop to it, in June 1982 the Israeli army invaded, in an operation codenamed "Peace for Galilee." Penetrating as far as the Beirut suburbs, it evicted the armed Palestinian groups from the country's south, then from Lebanon itself. The Palestinians departed on French ships headed for Tunisia, but would later come back to Tripoli in Lebanon's north, only to be chased from there too, this time by the Syrians and their local allies, in December 1983. The Shiite populace at first gladly welcomed the Israeli invaders who had rid them of the Palestinian *fedayeen*. But the military presence, which had linked up with the pro-Western Christian militias, changed the balance of power against Damascus and its Iranian ally. The assassination of the

new Lebanese President Bachir Gemayel was avenged by the massacre in the Palestinian camps at Sabra and Chatila in September 1982. It was carried out by Maronite Phalangist militias quite openly, with the Israeli army present.

The new president Amine Gemayel, brother of his late predecessor, signed a treaty with Israel with the aim of bringing about the latter's withdrawal from Lebanon and peace between the two countries, but this project was sabotaged by the joint action of Syria and Iran. The Islamic Republic deployed several hundred Revolutionary Guards (*pasdaran*) in the Bekaa, a majority Shiite region. This direct intervention on Lebanese territory was a prelude to setting up the "Party of God" or Hezbollah, which had recognized Khomeini as its guide and mentor. (Starting on December 15, 1981, Lebanon had already turned into an echo chamber of the Shiite-Sunni confrontation as incarnated by the Iran-Iraq war, with a first suicide attack directed at the Iraqi embassy.)

In September 1982 an American-French-Italian Multinational Force (MNF) arrived, charged with separating the combatants. Another suicide attack, this time against the United States embassy in April 1983, killed three. It was followed by two more on October 23 against the barracks of the American and French multinational force contingents, resulting in 256 and fifty-eight dead, respectively. No one took credit, but clearly these attacks had evolved from Iranian suicide tactics on the Iraqi front, now deployed against the conventional forces of the big powers. It was an asymmetric warfare that later jihadism would draw on for inspiration, since it succeeded in forcing the MNF out of Lebanon in 1984. Gradually, the Syria-Iran axis started running the show there, through the innumerable secondary twists and turns that three decades of conflict would bring.

This strategy's second strand consisted of taking hostages, which started on March 22, 1985. Ultimately, twelve French nationals, eight Americans, and seven individuals from other countries hostile to Iran were taken. The kidnapping of Jean-Paul Kauffman and Michel Seurat two months later was claimed by a Shiite ad hoc "Organization of Islamic Jihad," who demanded an end to France's aid to Baghdad. This came just as Paris had loaned Iraq the Super Étendard fighter-bombers. Additional context was that Iran wanted to obtain restitution of the shah's investment in the European nuclear authority, EURODIF, still blocked by France. This kidnapping spree, widely

covered by public television, one of whose film crews was also kidnapped, was a national tragedy in France, culminating in the news that the academic researcher Michel Seurat had died in captivity. An accord was reached when minister of foreign affairs Roland Dumas visited Teheran in 1989, followed by the freeing and expelling of terrorists jailed in France. Among them was a Lebanese Shiite who had tried to assassinate Shapour Bakhtiar, the shah's former prime minister and opponent of the Islamic Republic, in a Paris suburb in 1980.

In this way, Lebanese territory became a staging ground for Iran's anti-Western activities. South Lebanon, which gradually came under Hezbollah's total control, turned into a stronghold of the Resistance against Israel. The point of the spear was now the Shiite party; by making itself the champion of the battle against the "Zionist entity," it replaced the Arab nationalism of which the PLO had been the symbol par excellence. Hezbollah's popularity, and that of Iran, grew considerably as a result, even in the massively Sunni Arab world. It would culminate in the "33-Day War," spanning from July 12 to August 14, 2006, between Israel and Hezbollah. It went badly for the Israeli army and made Hassan Nasrallah, the secretary-general of the "Party of God," a genuine hero in the Arab world. He would even be celebrated on the satellite TV channels of the thoroughly Sunni Arabian Peninsula. This was a first for a Shiite who had pledged allegiance to Ayatollah Khomeini, leader of the Islamic Republic.

Even inside Lebanon, by embodying the Resistance (*muqawama*), Hezbollah acquired an immense legitimacy that extended beyond just the Shiite community. This enabled it to keep its weapons even while the other militias had to disarm. Starting in the late 1980s, Hezbollah came to wield a growing influence in Lebanon. The Taif agreement, signed October 22, 1989 in the Saudi resort town of that name, proved to be pivotal in this. The accord put an end to fifteen years of civil war, in essence ratifying the Christian defeat for the benefit of the Sunni. In effect, the Maronite president of the Republic lost his basic political prerogatives to the Sunni Muslim prime minister. This symbolically affirmed the victory of Saudi Islamization carried on a tide of petrodollars, incarnated in the person of the Lebanese-Saudi Sunni billionaire and politician Rafik Hariri. In reality, this accord would be overtaken in the ensuing years by the rapid evolution of forces on the ground, which saw the Sunni community marginalized, to

Hezbollah's advantage. Below, we will examine how this affected the 2000s and the 2010s.

* * *

The Islamization of the Palestinian conflict, preceded and followed by the Sunnis and Shiites competing for leadership in the region, constituted one of the major transformations of political symbolism in the Middle East during the 1980s. After 1979, following the successful Iranian Revolution, Fathi Shaqaqi, a Palestinian M.D. with a Muslim Brotherhood background living in exile in Egypt, published a book titled *Khomeini: the alternative Islamic solution*. He dedicated the work to Khomeini ("the revolutionary imam") and to the Brotherhood's founder Hassan al-Banna ("the martyred imam"). In its pages, the author gave voice to the intellectual closeness of the most radical of the Brothers, the disciples of Sayyid Qutb, with the Shiite activists of political Islam as transcending sectarian allegiances. Shaqaqi founded the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, an armed movement that, from 1983 onward, carried out the first violent actions against Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories. They were designed to show that the Jewish state was not invincible, at a time when the PLO was in disarray in Lebanon and the moderate branch of the Palestinian Brotherhood confined itself to charity work. During these years, the mystique of Palestinian training camps, which were being eliminated from Lebanon, was supplanted by that of the jihadist camps—the "Qaeda"—between Peshawar and the Afghan frontier. Abdullah Azzam, jihad's principal ideologue, was a Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood radical himself, for that matter. In his writings, he recalled that the liberation and Islamization of his native land was still his paramount objective—even if under present circumstances the focus had to be on Afghanistan as the best opportunity for armed jihad.

The combination of Shaqaqi's and Azzam's influence was the leaven in the radicalization of the Palestinian Brotherhood. It was baked into the first *Intifada* ("uprising"), or "revolt of the stones," starting in December 1987. It moved the resistance against Israel from outside to inside Palestine. Thus, it spread to the West Bank, Jerusalem, Gaza, and then to the territory of the Jewish state itself. In the decade that followed, it was paralleled by the birth of the "Islamic Resistance Movement," whose Arabic acronym spells Hamas (the word itself means "zeal"). As the Intifada grew, Hamas challenged the

leadership monopoly of the Palestinian cause by Arafat's PLO by publishing its own calendar of the mandatory strike days. On August 18, 1988, Hamas also published a charter that differed from the PLO's, which until then had been the sole official reference. The Hamas charter stated that the jihad for liberating the Islamic territory of Palestine was an "individual obligation" (*fard ʿayn*), echoing the term used by Azzam to describe the Afghan jihad when it was about to checkmate the Soviet Army. If the PLO at the end of the 1980s still retained its capacity for political maneuver, it was shaken by the Islamization of its cause. Hamas would grow in the following years thanks to a flood of petrodollars from the Arabian Peninsula. In 1990, for example, Kuwait gave Hamas sixty million U.S. dollars but the PLO only twenty-seven million. In August of that year, Arafat supported Iraq when Saddam Hussein invaded the Emirate, as we will see below.

1989: Islamization on the Ruins of Communism

As the year 1989 came to a close, the Islamic context had become a true part of the international system. Whereas the confrontation of the free world led by Washington and the socialist world directed from Moscow had served, since Yalta in 1945, as the prime engine of global history's dialectic, 1989 constituted a watershed in more ways than one. The emergence of Islamization supported by a gush of oil revenue took on all the more meaning as a profound cultural break in a year that also marked the bicentennial of the French Revolution, secularism's midwife par excellence.

In France, the celebrations were marked by the first incident of students wearing the veil in a public middle school in Creil, near Paris. This would begin fifteen years of multiple court proceedings that pitted Islamist associations against the state. It only ended in March 2004, with the passage of a law that definitively forbade the wearing of "ostentatious religious symbols" in educational institutions financed by taxpayer money. After the jolt of the Rushdie affair across the Channel at the start of the year, these two dominant concepts emerged, however differentiated, of multicultural British secularism and French republican secularism. Each school of thought was born from the European humanistic ideals of the Enlightenment, and both countries were hit equally hard by the Islamization of social and moral values, by revolutionary Shiism on the one hand and conservative Sunnism on the other.

The "affair of the veil" at Creil, a working-class area in the Paris banlieues, started on September 18, 1989 when three Muslim girls attending middle school refused to remove their hijabs in class. By a significant coincidence, this happened a few weeks before the Berlin Wall was breached on November 9, and the French press and public opinion were more excited and divided about the former event than the latter. The uproar triggered by an adolescent's fabric headscarf, despite its apparent triviality, preoccupied the public more than the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the USSR, and the dissolution of communism. This paralleled how Khomeini's fatwa condemning the author of *The Satanic Verses* earlier that year had totally blown away the news of the Soviets surrendering Kabul the next day. While Anglo-Saxon observers ridiculed the veil affair and the public's response as typical French insanity, the situation was more complicated than that. It signaled the onset in society of an insidious type of cultural fracturing brought on by the process of Islamization of France's disenfranchised banlieues. This cultural break would replace the social fracture translated politically by the confrontations between the left and the right. In this respect, it mirrored the end of the global face-off between East and West, between Communism and Free World. It also inaugurated a reading of contemporary history as the opposition of the two binary entities of the West and Islam, as Harvard Professor Samuel Huntington argued in his bestselling book, *The Clash of Civilizations*, published in 1996.

Three decades later, this cultural fracture has widened considerably. In France, exacerbated by jihadist terrorism, it has developed into a fissure running through French society (as it has for the rest of the world). In 1989, France saw the same phenomenon crop up close to home, with Islamization taking hold in the heart of Algeria's political space. This mattered, not only because France was linked to Algeria by the vexatious legacy of 132 years of colonial history, but because France has several million residents primarily of Algerian origin, the majority of whom already had obtained French citizenship or would be naturalized.

Indeed, in March 1989, an Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was formed in the Ben Badis mosque in Algiers by a conglomerate of Islamic activists and preachers, Salafists, and jihadists of various backgrounds. At the same time, fighters were trickling back from Afghanistan, crowned with glory from their victory over the USSR the previous month. As it happened, the USSR was a key supporter of the National Liberation Front (FLN), the party in power

in Algeria. Moscow had trained many of the regime's cadres, mentored it on its disastrous march into socialism, and equipped its army. Algeria had "built socialism" thanks to oil and gas income that the military oligarchy controlled, using it to buy peace in the streets while destroying civil society and wiping out what was left of the entrepreneurial class. This strategy disempowered a population whose considerable demographic growth had been encouraged by a fierce competition with Morocco for hegemony over the Maghreb. Algeria was left highly exposed to fluctuations in the price of hydrocarbons, which subsidized the entire economy. The 1986 economic downturn led to cutting the state budget in half, resulting in a declining standard of living. This dire situation was aggravated by mismanagement, corruption, and the mainstreaming of the *trabendo* (black market).

Little wonder, then, that in this downbeat context furious riots broke out on October 4, 1988, which took several hundred lives before they were put down. Over the course of the riots, impoverished urban youths vilified the police as "Jews" while state television broadcast images denouncing how the Israelis were repressing the Palestinian Intifada. Like Iran in 1978, the Algerian uprising initially did not have an Islamic imprint. It was the strongman, President Chadli Bendjedid, who ultimately called in Islamic preachers to meet and calm a situation that had deteriorated into looting.

The Islamist movement in Algeria grew substantially during the 1980s, as it did elsewhere in the Sunni world. In 1982, Mustapha Buyali, at the head of the Armed Islamic Movement (MIA) and inspired by reading Sayyid Qutb, went underground, imitating the FLN during the war of independence against France from 1954 to 1962. His goal was to see sharia implemented in the country through armed jihad, but MIA had a limited impact, and Buyali was killed five years later. Meanwhile, the regime got rid of anyone intent on following in his footsteps by letting them depart unhindered for Afghanistan.

At the same time, conservative movements fought the leftist students at the university, demanding generalized use of Arabic, less French, and implementation of sharia in legislation. Led by Abbassi Madani (future president of the Islamic Salvation Front, or FIS) in mass prayers, these conservative movements were also targeted for repression. The dominant political powers were careful to kneecap any Islamization not controlled by the state, as Sadat had done in Egypt the previous decade. A regime-sponsored, Islam-inspired family code was adopted by parliament, the country was covered

with mosques, and literature and cassettes by Wahhabi preachers flooded the Algiers book market, crowding out works in French. Egyptian sheikh Yussef al-Qaradawi, a major public face of the Muslim Brotherhood, was invited by the government to help nurture the country's "Islamic revival." He would later come to host the main religious broadcast on the Al Jazeera network and become a key player in Islamizing the Arab uprisings of 2011.

In Algeria, an Islamist counter-elite had thus constituted itself within the framework of the general Islamization of politics which had been inspired by that of the oil monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula since 1973. Only now, with a few years' lag behind the Middle East, was it impacting North Africa. And it was to this bearded elite that President Chadli, deprived of the traditional go-betweens of the sole party—the decaying FLN—and targeted by protests, turned to help reestablish calm. To this end, on October 10 he summoned the preacher Sahnoun, Buyali's former disciple; Ali Belhadj, the impassioned tribune of jihad; and Mahfud Nahnah, leader of the Muslim Brotherhood. After they issued their appeal, the looting stopped, a testament to their influence. In return, Chadli authorized a multiparty system, paving the way for the creation of the FIS in 1989.

FIS experienced meteoric growth when it cracked the code on how to bring two antagonistic social classes together; under the umbrella of an Islamist intelligentsia, it organized the impoverished urban youth—called *hittistes* in the local dialect ("those who stand against the wall," a euphemism for being unemployed)—and the pious middle classes. It was a revolutionary process reminiscent, at least initially, of the Iranian Revolution. The FIS grew in popularity when it demanded the release of MIA jihadists, imprisoned under "unbeliever" justice, by organizing incessant marches and sit-ins, and when it stepped in for a state slow to react to the earthquake in Tipasa, a coastal city in Western Algeria, in September. FIS triumphed in the local elections of June 1990, which gave it a network of "Islamic municipalities." It found success again in the parliamentary elections of December 1991. However, the army shut them down, depriving the party of its victory and, as we will see below, paving the way for a jihad that would spill over onto French soil.

The Islamists in Algeria, despite their initial successes, were thus blocked from taking power. However, elsewhere in the Sunni Arab world, the year 1989 saw a regime led by a personality with Islamist sympathies installed in Sudan for the first time. Hassan al-Turabi was a charismatic intellectual from a religious background, later educated in England and France.

Close to Third World circles, like Ali Shariati in the Shiite world, he favored "top-down" Islamization. He preferred to address himself to the Sudanese intelligentsia (in large part former members of the Communist Party), which, for an Arab country, was exceptionally powerful.

Released from a seven-year prison sentence, al-Turabi adopted a pragmatic approach of infiltrating the state apparatus, the army, and the Islamic banking system that Saudi Arabia was setting up throughout the country. He had exerted his influence during the last years of the regime of General Nimeyri in the early 1980s, when the latter took steps to ban alcohol and establish sharia. In January 1985, the general also had an intellectual, Mohammed Mahmud Taha, hanged for proposing a critical rereading of the Koran. After Nimeyri's regime fell later that year, al-Turabi called the National Islamic Front into being, while the civil war between the Muslim North and the Animist and Christian South ravaged the country. He provided the army with Islamic legitimization for its actions. When the military setback at Khartoum in the South led to the coup d'état by General Omar al-Bashir on June 30, 1989, al-Turabi became the new regime's éminence grise.

Even while the Soviet system and communist ideology were foundering in late 1989, the Islamist movement racked up some weighty achievements beyond its role in the Soviet Army's rout from Kabul and the successful power grab in Khartoum. Through the Rushdie affair in the United Kingdom and the Islamic veil dispute in France, the Islamic movement gained a niche foothold in the cultural politics of these two European democracies. Then there was the Taif agreement that effectively cemented Muslim predominance in Lebanon, as well as the creation of the FIS and Hamas, whose effects would be felt long-term. But foremost, it was the jihad launched in Algeria, in reaction to the army stopping the election just before the FIS's impending surefire victory, that would characterize the last decade of the twentieth century. It would be joined by two other jihads, one in Egypt and the other in Bosnia.

The First Phase of Jihadism in Check: The 1990s

The 1990s were marked above all by the opening of three jihad fronts in Egypt, Algeria, and Bosnia that were modeled on that of Afghanistan during the 1980s. Algeria and Bosnia are linked or contiguous with Europe,

foreshadowing the waves of attacks on the continent in the following two decades. In stretches of fighting lasting from three to five years, the jihadists failed to make headway, but learned from these failures. Bin Laden and Zawahiri would draw on these lessons in preparing jihadism's second phase, which culminated in the "blessed dual raid" of September 11, 2001 on New York and Washington.

The 1990s would, however, open with an internal conflict in the rentier system of the Sunni oil-producing countries, which would fracture the Islamization pursued by the petromonarchies. This conflict was set off by jihadists turning against the regime in Riyadh. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was punished by a military coalition led by the United States, jumping off from bases on Saudi territory, with the goal of liberating the Emirate. This provoked a violent Islamist protest in Saudi Arabia, ten years after the Mecca uprising. Osama bin Laden became its supreme exponent, thereby making his split with the powers in his native country explicit. The attack on Kuwait by Saddam Hussein's army on August 2, 1990 was a paradoxical consequence of the Iran-Iraq war. Like the other oil kingdoms in the Gulf Cooperation Council, Kuwait was haunted by fear of the Khomeinist revolution spreading to the Arabian Peninsula. They had therefore generously financed "Saddam's Qadisiyyah " with loans. The danger averted after the conflict ended in the summer of 1988, Baghdad, ruined and with its oil fields out of commission, was unable to meet its debt obligations. The escalating tensions ended in the "attack on the bank" by its debtor, as the saying went at the time.

The interplay of oil, war, and Islamization was immediately evident, because the invasion kicked off while the members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), chaired the previous year by Kuwait, were meeting that morning in Cairo. At the opening hour of the conference, with the mission of propagating Islam around the world under Saudi leadership on the agenda, one of the OIC's member states had been attacked, defeated, and annexed by another. Saddam's troops, after making short work of the Emirate, henceforward to be known as Iraq's "nineteenth province," advanced to the Saudi border, putting the Hasa oilfields within striking distance.

A thoroughly panicked King Fahd, self-titled the "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques," appealed on August 7 to the Americans for troops to

safeguard the kingdom's territorial integrity. However, this invitation to the "infidels" to trample on the country's holy ground, prompted the jihadists, abundantly financed previously by Riyadh in Afghanistan, to accuse the Wahhabite king of denying Islam. They based this accusation on one of the Prophet's sayings (*hadith*) cited by the monarchy itself as a justification for barring any faith but Islam from its territory: "Expel the Jews and the Christians from the Arabian Peninsula." In its strictest interpretation, this hadith explicitly forbade relying on "crusader" soldiers, who would sow sedition among Muslims. This ideological split in the Salafist Sunni camp would persist for decades.

Saddam Hussein in the same way had weaponized Islam's symbolic register against Teheran during the war to dispute Iran's hegemony over Islam by calling his offensive "Qaddisiya." He now justified his raid on Kuwait and the coming conflict with Saudi Arabia by hoisting the banner of jihad against the dynasties that he called vassals of the West. However, Saddam's apparatus for Islamic legitimization was relatively weak in the face of the well-oiled machinery of the Saudi Council of Senior Ulemas—after all, it was he who had ordered many Iraqi clerics to be hanged, assassinated, or imprisoned. To compensate, he now embellished his jihad with populist accents. When the first contingent of an eventual half-million American soldiers landed in Saudi Arabia, he doubled down his rhetoric on hatred of the West, crusaders, colonialism, imperialism, and so on. His supporters across the Arab world chimed in with the same enthusiasm as the nationalists who regarded him as Nasser reincarnated, and the Islamist radicals who dreamed of seeing the House of Saud come tumbling down.

The "Arab street"—an expression that flourished about this time—further ignited Saddam's popularity on January 15, 1991, when the Desert Storm operation commenced. It first pushed the Iraqi troops out of Kuwait toward Iraq, then back across the border. By launching a few Scud missiles that landed in Israeli territory, Saddam further galvanized the masses by rekindling their anti-Zionism. Arafat lent his support, a move that would reduce the PLO's subsidies from the Gulf after Saddam's defeat while increasing subsidies to his rival Hamas. The mythmaking about the Scuds was especially pronounced in the Maghreb, where mobilization took an anti-French turn after President Mitterrand joined the coalition on the side of the United States.

In Morocco, I heard the following story: "Morocco decided to launch a Scud against France. But, at the last moment, it failed to launch. They discovered that a dozen people were clinging to it in hopes of getting to France without needing a visa." This canard amply illustrates the ambiguity of the postcolonial relationship between France and the Maghreb. In Algeria, support for Saddam was rallied by the most radical fringe of the FIS, the Islamist party that had just been formed and had carried the June 1990 municipal elections. The preacher Ali Belhadj marched in combat fatigues at the head of immense processions, chanting, "Strike, Saddam!" These masses turned into voters that cast ballots en masse for the FIS, which therefore won the first round of parliamentary elections in December that year.

The Saudi king Fahd thus found his teaching authority over the global Islamization process imperiled by a one-upmanship that turned Islamization's own discourse back on him. At first, the Saudi liberal circles had tried to benefit from the Western military presence by pushing reforms. With American female soldiers driving vehicles in plain view, sixty-six Saudi women got behind the wheel in public on November 6, 1990. This attracted an immediate, violent response from the authorities, who gave free rein to the most conservative circles that reviled the women as "communist whores." (Saudi women would have to wait until September 2017 for a decree to finally be published permitting women to drive, effective with Ramadan in June 2018.)

The Islamist current also manifested itself with a gradually increasing virulence against King Fahd. It did not help that the monarch had already burned his fingers on the takeover of the Grand Mosque of Mecca, at the dawn of the new Hegirian century ten years earlier. In a first, in May 1991, on the initiative of a young imam named Salman al-ʿAuda—who would be alternately imprisoned and co-opted by the monarchy over the course of the next decade—109 preachers and activists addressed a "letter of complaints" (*khitab al-matalib*) to the king. It implored him to keep the kingdom true to the strictest Wahhabism and expel the nefarious influence of Christians and Jews. In veiled terms, it critiqued the royal family's monopoly on power, its religious legitimacy having been damaged by the arrival of "crusader" troops on Saudi territory. The petitioners asked for the creation of a "consultative council."

King Fahd first had the oldest ulemas reprimand the initiative's promoters on the grounds that, by going public with their complaints, they risked sowing sedition (*fitna*) among believers. Then he moved to adopt their idea of a council, but appointed members of the great tribes, most of whom were Western educated. Some of the letter signers then published a no-holds barred "memorandum of admonition" (*mudhakirat an-nasiha*) attacking the regime to its core: it demanded independence for clerics, as well as total Islamization of the law and the banking system, then went on to criticize the weakness of the Saudi army, the inviting into the kingdom of the American military, and so on.

On May 3, 1993, some of the memorandum authors formed an anti-establishment Islamist organization—an intolerable, incongruous precedent for a kingdom positioning itself as promoter of a total Islamization aiming to saturate the religious landscape. The new group's Arabic logo, "Committee for the Defense of Sharia Rights," translated into English as "Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights." It was a play on the ambiguity of the Arabic word in order to mobilize support in the West from liberals and defenders of human rights not versed in Arabic. In the event, the signatories were quickly jailed but were soon released under pressure from Amnesty International. Their leader, Muhammad al-Mass'ari, was allowed to emigrate to London in April 1994. For two years, he railed against the Saudi regime from there, exposing its wickedness via fax. (As this was before the Internet, his fax bill grew so large that British Telecom suspended his line for non-payment in 1996.)

While King Fahd was jailing the main players in this protester Islamist movement known as *sahwa* ("awakening"), Mass'ari stepped back in 1996, letting Osama bin Laden take his place. Linked to the memorandum's authors, bin Laden had fled Saudi Arabia in 1991 to Afghanistan, then relocated to al-Turabi's Sudan where he lived from 1992–1996. His first slogan was "Chase the Americans out of the Arabian Peninsula." During the invasion of Kuwait, he had offered to deploy his jihadist brigades against Saddam's troops. Scorning his offer, on August 7, 1990, the king appealed instead to the Americans to come to the rescue. This affront would be avenged, as we will argue further on, with the attacks against the United States embassies in Tanzania and Kenya in 1998, on the eighth anniversary of the Kuwaiti king's appeal.

The Algerian Jihad (1992–1997)—Terror on Europe's Doorstep

After the Soviet Army's withdrawal from Afghanistan on February 15, 1989, the foreign jihadists able to do so trickled back home. Many were determined to duplicate the Afghan experience by overturning what they considered to be "apostate" regimes and replacing them with Islamic states. Chechnya, for example, was rife with Saudi jihadi veterans of Afghanistan. But, aside from unrest in some Muslim countries as the USSR split apart, three main areas of jihad marked the decade: Algeria, Egypt, and Bosnia. In the first two, the fighters were homegrown; in Bosnia, the bulk of the jihadi contingent consisted of Saudis, Egyptians, and some European converts. Hardly any Bosnians had been to Afghanistan.

In Algeria, the return of the "Afghans," beginning in 1989, coincided with social unrest that had its roots in the uprisings and looting of October 1988, the disintegration of the ruling National Liberation Front (FLN), and the debut of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). The mosque where these Afghan-war veterans congregated in the rundown Algiers working-class neighborhood of Belcourt (whose previous claim to fame was as the place where Nobel Prize–winning novelist Albert Camus spent his youth in the 1920s) was aptly nicknamed "Kabul." Joining with the veterans of Mustapha Buyali's Islamic Armed Movement, they stormed a military post in the town of Guemmar on November 28, 1991. Here they decapitated the draftees to commemorate the impending anniversary of the "martyrdom" of Abdullah Azzam, the ideologue of jihad.

This invasion of the Guemmar military post was also their way of registering disapproval of the Islamic Salvation Front's electoral strategy. After its tidal wave victory in the municipal elections of June 1990, the FIS found itself caught in a tug-of-war. On one side was the conservative wing, consisting of middle-class believers represented by ʿAbbassi Madani, intent on Islamizing the state structure put in place by the FLN. Pulling it the other way were the poor urban youth, eager to do battle and overturn the social order. As a result, the FIS adopted a dual power structure in 1991. It paralyzed the country with an insurrectional strike that translated into the arrest of the party's two principal leaders, Madani and Belhadj, who would spend the entire civil war in prison. But, for the most part, the FIS carried the first round of parliamentary elections on December 26—even with a million fewer

votes than in the previous municipal elections. This relative success meant it would still achieve an absolute majority in the second round of voting set for mid January 1992.

President Chadli's strategy of holding on to power by co-opting a minority FIS was thwarted by the party's absolute domination at the ballot box. On January 11, 1992, the military top-brass dismissed the president and "suspended" the elections. It arrested most of the FIS's leaders and cadres on March 4. Far from the situation in Iran, where one organized, hierarchized clergy unified and successfully managed the process of taking power, the FIS had failed in its attempted coup. Because of its multiple tendencies and personalities, it could not channel its immense popularity into the machinery of a victorious revolutionary party. It never recovered from this violent repression by the army—which, in turn, would have to deal with five years of civil war. The ensuing jihad waged against the generals and their allies resulted in an estimated 100,000 dead at least.

The scattering of the Islamist movement's leadership would rapidly alienate the masses that had followed the FIS. In particular, the party's conflicting social memberships would cause its electoral base to splinter. It tried to offset this with religious slogans pitting "good Muslims" against "unbelievers and apostates" in a binary, doctrinal manner. The movement's "moderate" leadership believed in the electoral process for Islamizing the country without the need to revamp the political structure in depth. But the army stopping the elections between rounds dealt the moderate branch a major, strategic defeat. This coup d'état therefore strengthened the party's most "extremist" faction. In effect, the Afghan jihad model was transposed to Algeria, where it was crossbred with the homegrown guerrillas, dating back to the "mujahideen" of the war of independence (1954–1962) and to Mustapha Buyali's Islamic Armed Movement (MIA) (1982–1987).

While FIS leadership was fragmenting, local jihadists and Afghanistan veterans joined forces in founding the Islamic Armed Group (GIA) in October 1992. Its first "emir," Abdelhaq Layada, an erstwhile auto-body repairer, excommunicated the FIS leaders as "unbelievers." He also declared that spilling their blood would be lawful, the same as that of all agents of the state and other "children of France." In a long text attributed to Layada that appeared in March 1993—whether he authored it is not certain—he appropriated the Afghan jihad. Like the Algerian jihad that he intended

to lead, he decreed it to be every believer's "individual obligation" (*fard ʿayn*), as Abdullah Azzam had done. He also subscribed to the Buyali epic. In 1993–1994, GIA started a phase of large-scale massacres, concentrating on "soft targets." These included the despised Francophone intellectuals, members of civil society, doctors, and journalists—all easier to get to than the army brass. And, because these targeted individuals were rich in the cultural capital needed for social climbing, the GIA focused on harnessing the frustration and rage of the "*hittistes*." They had missed out on accumulating this kind of capital when the FLN arabized the schools. Furthermore, because many of the GIA's victims were national or international celebrities, their symbolic slaughter gave rise to a general panic. The working-class districts and rural areas came under GIA control, escaping the authority of the state, which isolated them in retaliation but did not enter them. At first, local Islamist notables financed such GIA enclaves but gradually they also found themselves victimized by the predation and rackets of the youth gangs claiming to wage jihad. After three years, the GIA's supporters had had enough and cut them off.

From July 1993, the Algerian jihadists who had emigrated to "Londonistan" (where the British authorities welcomed Islamists of all stripes, thinking they could control and appease them) published the *Al-Ansar* bulletin. Faxed *urbi et orbi* on Fridays when the mosques let out, it supported the GIA in the name of international jihadism. It was managed most prominently by Abu Mussab al-Suri, the Syrian activist and French-educated engineer who would play a major role in the later history of jihadism in ISIS years until the 2010s.

The GIA's heady rise to "fame" persuaded several FIS leaders to join their cause during a clandestine meeting on May 13, 1994. This forced the FIS Executive Instance Abroad (IEFE) to set up a rival armed group, the Islamic Army of Salvation (AIS), on July 18. It was conceived to be the military pole that eventually would enter into negotiations with the Algerian generals. The GIA rejected any perspective of the kind. Instead, it demanded that the earth be purified of "unbelievers" and the Islamic state they longed for be established through jihad. The two factions fought each other in bloody battles, weakening them both vis-à-vis the dominant political powers. Killed off in quick succession, emir followed emir as head of the GIA.

On October 27, 1994, it was Djamel Zituni's turn. He began by exporting jihad with the hijacking of an Air France Airbus set to depart from Algiers on Christmas, the Christian holy day (making it a highly symbolic act), and then went on fomenting bloody attacks in France through 1995. These operations in effect reignited the struggle against the former colonial power to GIA's greater glory at home. The tactical objective was to have France suspend all aid to the Algerian powers. However, these efforts would backfire because the stepped-up jihadist violence, accompanied by internal purges and executions, was also being visited on society in general. Suspected of being an agent provocateur working for the regime, Zituni found himself repudiated by the editors of the *Al-Ansar* bulletin. Middle-class believers were terrified and repulsed when the violence culminated in the bloodbaths of the Algiers banlieues Raïs and Bentalha in August and September 1997 respectively. With the GIA having massacred several hundred people, once again there was suspicion of manipulation by undercover agents. This caused the GIA to fold on September 27 of that year, the occasion marked by a final communiqué from the last emir. As for AIS, it had called a unilateral truce six days earlier: the powers-that-be promised to pardon AIS members, so long as they abided by the compromise negotiated.

Despite several years of persistent but sporadic localized violence, by the autumn of 1997, armed jihad had lost the battle for Algeria. In return for concessions by the new "national concord" regime that Abdelaziz Bouteflika was called on to lead in 1999, many "moderate Islamists" were co-opted into the machinery of state—where they would presumably promote Algeria's Islamization. Even with a very strong popular mobilization in its early days, the FIS had not been capable of uniting its militants and followers in a revolution that would topple the government, as had occurred in Iran in 1978–1979. The diverging sociopolitical strategies of the middle-class faithful and the poor urban youth were beyond reconciling by an insufficiently organized Islamist intelligentsia. If anything, these schisms worsened during the civil war, whose escalating violence played into the hands of the dominant powers. But, as we shall see, the international Islamist movement that grouped behind bin Laden would draw strategic lessons from this failure, as well as from the fruitless contemporaneous Egyptian and Bosnian jihads.

Looking beyond its failure, however, the Algerian jihad had heralded and prototyped another phenomenon that would manifest itself on an immense scale after 2011—the spillover into French territory (i.e. on European soil) of Islamist terrorism. It began with the Christmas 1994 diversion of the Airbus from Algiers. The hijacking ended at the Marseille airport, with the French national gendarmerie SWAT team (GIGN, the same intervention force called in at Mecca in November 1979) neutralizing the four hijackers who had killed three hostages in Algiers. Next, between July 11 and October 17, 1995, the GIA launched a series of attacks in France that caused a dozen deaths and over 175 wounded. They were masterminded by Khaled Kelkal, a young Algerian born in 1971 who had grown up in the Lyon area in central France. After growing up alienated in school, he rediscovered Islam while in prison—from 2000 and onward, this was a typical route taken by hundreds of jihadists. While in full jihad mode in Algeria in 1993, Kelkal became immersed in the GIA and, upon his return to France, received his mission. On July 11, 1995, he killed Imam Abdelbaki Sahraui, a founder of FIS, who had found refuge in the Paris working-class district of Barbès, an area with high levels of North African immigration, where he preached in a mosque. Sahraui, whom French Minister of the Interior Charles Pasqua considered to be the FIS spokesman, was the guarantor that France would remain a sanctuary from the events in Algeria.

Sahraui's death made France and its roughly two million Algerian nationals or residents hostages of a jihad that had crossed the Mediterranean and established a European bridgehead. It would inspire the next generation of jihadists to concentrate on targets there. Local Islamist associations, like the Union of Islamic Organizations in France (UOIF, which was close to the Muslim Brotherhood) treated France as a land of Islam (*dar al-islam*) for the Muslims living there (thus proscribing any act of war on its soil). But the GIA activists turned it into a "land of war" (*dar al-harb*) where jihad and spilling the blood of unbelievers and other apostates was lawful. The attacks, including those on transportation networks (methods which would be replicated by al-Qaeda in Madrid in March 2004, and in London in July 2005), targeted travelers randomly. However, none of the expected larger impacts materialized. The vast majority of Algerians in France did not fall in line. The "*darons*" (heads of families), who then still exerted a strong influence in community affairs, distanced themselves

from the troublemakers who were endangering the social integration they had achieved at great cost. Kelkal, with nowhere to hide, was tracked down in a forest by police and killed.

The French government hardened its position on Islamist terrorism, and the significant resources allocated to its intelligence services boosted their effectiveness. France then would go sixteen years without an attack on its soil (with the sole exception of the Roubaix affair, see below), thanks to good intelligence on the terrorist networks. Then the jihadist program mutated, while the French intelligence world, closed in on itself, rested on its laurels. And jihad would thrive anew as of March 19, 2012 when Algerian-French petty criminal Mohamed Merah shot soldiers and butchered Jewish students in Toulouse in the name of Allah.

The Abortive Jihads in Egypt (1992–1997) and Bosnia (1992–1995)

1992, the same year that saw the start of the Algerian jihad, also saw Egypt and Bosnia descend into this kind of civil war. However, circumstances differed in these two nations: Egypt, a Muslim country since the earliest days of Islam, harbored a Christian community, the Copts. They had survived, if shrunken, for centuries, but jihadist violence and Salafist denunciations aimed at them had crescendoed in the past half-century. Cairo also boasted the prestigious Al-Azhar Islamic University, even if its aura was dimmed by the control the state wielded over it. The financial heft of Salafism, subsidized by millions of petrodollars from the Arabian Peninsula, made the university reliant to a degree on this imported ideology, to which a number of its students and teachers had gravitated.

In contrast, Bosnians had converted to Islam only recently by historical standards, when the Ottoman Empire invaded the Balkans beginning in the sixteenth century CE. Muslims were always in the minority there. Few of the world's Muslims even realized that a population of coreligionists, European natives of Slavic ethnicity at that, lived in that region. This would change when civil war started to tear the former Yugoslavia apart in 1991, on its way once more to becoming "balkanized" by the ensuing violence. The sudden formulation of a political "Islamity" within a fairly secularized population was construed by the Bosnians' Serb enemies as a stigma.

On the other hand, the international entrepreneurs of Islamization ostentatiously turned their attention to it. In effect, Bosnia would be taken hostage by the Iran-Saudi conflict.

Both jihads, one on the banks of the Nile and the other in the Balkans, proved unsuccessful, but they would have important repercussions. Egyptian Islamism, despite the defeat of its armed branch in 1997, became a principal opponent of the Mubarak regime. It proceeded to win the first presidential election following the 2010–2012 uprising, before being crushed in the repression that followed. Bosnian Islamism lost its symbolic centrality after hostilities ended in December 1995. However, in the jihadist imagination, Bosnia would powerfully reinforce the idea that Europe was Islamic territory on which the battle to end all battles would be fought. The last attack planned in France after the death of Khaled Kelkal in the 1990s, in the Lille-Roubaix metropolis, was the work of jihadist converts who had returned from Bosnia.

After Kabul fell to the mujahideen led by Commander Massud in April 1992, most Egyptian jihadists returned home. There they joined two activist movements that had grown out of the Sadat assassination, whose members had been freed by Hosni Mubarak, Sadat's successor, from the second half of the previous decade onward. The first, the Organization of Gihad, which had carried out the head of state's assassination, targeted the institutions and agents of the dominant political powers. However, it was careful to avoid any kind of "excommunication" (*takfir*) of society. The second, the *gama'a islamiyya* ("Islamic Association") was headed by the blind sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, who, quite the contrary, sought to take society hostage. This was the same sheikh who would be convicted in the United States for the first attack on the World Trade Center in 1993, and who would die in a U.S. prison in February 2017. His theory was that by relentlessly attacking civilians he would provoke an outsize, indiscriminate repression that would deprive the state of popular support.

This strategy was reminiscent of the one GIA tried in Algeria. In Egypt, Abdel Rahman's victims of choice were Copts, foreign tourists, and "Westernized" intellectuals. The five years of jihadist violence that followed started with the assassination of the secular essayist Farag Foda on June 8, 1992. Foda, who was born a Muslim, promoted secularism instead of sharia. This made him an apostate whose blood could be spilled without sin. At least, this was the defense offered in court by Mohammed al-Ghazali, a prominent

member of the Muslim Brotherhood, at the trial of Foda's killers. He argued that the assassins could not be blamed for having applied Islamic law, since the state had failed to do so. In the same spirit, university professor Nasr Abu Zeid who, having written a book titled *Critique of religious discourse*, was also declared an "apostate." He was automatically divorced from his Muslim wife (who did not want to) on the grounds that an apostate could not stay married to a Muslim. The couple had to flee to Holland to continue their married life in exile there. And, in October 1994 in Cairo, Nagib Mahfuz, recipient of the Nobel Prize in literature, was stabbed by a *gam'a islamiyya* activist for his "licentious" novels.

This poisonous atmosphere testified to the permeability between jihadists and so-called moderate Islamists, even judges. It also revealed a congruence in the radical opposition to Mubarak's power that some members of the pious middle class shared with the young urban poor. But, unlike in Algeria, Egypt had no place for a unifying, FIS-like Islamist party capable of saturating the religious space without facing any serious competition. On the banks of the Nile, the Al-Azhar institution endured, despite its weakening and partial permeability to Salafism. For one thing, the network of Sufi brotherhoods remained tight-knit enough to prevent an Islamist party from establishing hegemony over the Muslim religious field. This explains in part why the Egyptian jihad's death toll, at about a thousand, was approximately a hundred times lower than in Algeria. Also, it did not gain much on the ground; the Egyptian state gave up only a few scattered stretches of territory to the jihadists, and then only temporarily.

This ceded territory included some strongholds in Upper Egypt, in the governorates where Copts made up as much as 20 percent of the population. Here, the hatred directed against the Christians had a social dimension. It was a time of massive unemployment, resulting from a transient drop in oil prices and reduced emigration flows to the Arabian Peninsula (where Egyptian degrees had been devalued by the collapse of the Egyptian educational system and Egyptian immigration reduced as a consequence). It all translated into people flocking to the Islamist ideology of rupture. Attacks on "arrogant" Copt pharmacists, goldsmiths, and merchants multiplied, justified by fanatical sheikhs as the welcome looting of infidels, as did the torching of churches.

The jihadists had saturated Cairo's disinherited suburb of Embaba, primarily inhabited by rural migrants from Upper Egypt, so heavily with

patrols that the sheikh of its main mosque in an interview with Reuters proclaimed the enclave the "Islamic Republic of Embaba." He also asserted that sharia was applied 100 percent on its territory. In 1992, Mubarak, made skittish by the Algerian precedent, sent 14,000 police and soldiers to occupy the place and eradicate the jihadists. Moves like these kept the diverse social components of the Islamist movement from fusing into a coherent whole. In addition to this, on October 12 an earthquake caused a thousand deaths and ten times that number of injured in Cairo. The manifold Islamist movements—as they had in Algeria at Tipasa the previous year—developed impressive charitable activities to aid the victims (utilizing tents originally destined for Bosnian Muslims). Their actions contrasted sharply with the government's laggard response.

Still, the repression by the state had not kept the Muslim Brotherhood from winning elections in all the professional unions, from doctors and engineers to attorneys. This demonstrated their doctrinal influence over the degree holders and the liberal professions. The state—spooked by the Algerian example—sought compromises with them in an attempt to divide the Islamist movement. But the confrontation intensified from 1993 on. Mubarak himself barely escaped an assassination attempt instigated by Egyptian jihadists at an African summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in June 1995. From there, *gam'a islamiyya* switched to targeting tourists, one of Egypt's fiscal mainstays, in March 1996 massacring eighteen Greeks in Cairo, having mistaken them for Israelis.

The jihadists expected that the collapse of this crucial, hard-currency earning sector would hasten the fall of the Mubarak regime, but they were disappointed in that hope. The primary victims of the breakdown in security were the millions of Egyptians making their living, directly or indirectly, in the tourist industry. In short, this tactic cost the activists in Upper Egypt—between Aswan and Luxor, where most of the tourist attractions are located—their popular support. On December 17, 1997, two months after the massacres in the Algiers suburbs attributed to the GIA, the *gam'a islamiyya* massacred sixty tourists in the Temple of Hatshepsut at Luxor. This slaughter sounded the death knell of the Egyptian jihad of the 1990s, forcing even some Islamist groups to dissociate themselves from it. The activists' military failure was a clear, if temporary, setback for the Islamist movement. This setback did nothing to defuse the movement's social causes, or the striking features of an Islamization of popular culture promoted with

petrodollars from the Arabian Peninsula. However, as we will soon discover, it forced a major strategic shift in Islamist ideology, shifting its focus from localized conflicts to global terrorism.

* * *

The jihad in Bosnia found its cause in the Serb aggression against Sarajevo after Bosnia-Herzegovina declared independence in March 1992. This fit into the larger framework of a new "Balkan war," only this time it came at the end of the twentieth century as the old Yugoslavia disintegrated along historical fault lines of ethnicity and religion. Unlike Algeria and Egypt, Bosnia's jihad did not stem from a historic process of Islamization from within that had deeply penetrated the society. It resulted, instead, from an outside stimulus with the motive of portraying Muslims, among others, as victims of persecution and of ethnic cleansing. This allowed for the prolongment of the international jihadist movement born in Afghanistan that ended in April of 1992, when Kabul finally fell to the mujahideen after the dictator Najibullah, the Soviets' former vassal, was eliminated.

In 1936, a pan-Islamism movement had surfaced in some Bosnian intellectual circles in reaction to the abolition of the Istanbul caliphate in 1924. Modeled on the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, it called itself *Al-Hidaje* (from the Arabic *hidaya*: the guide toward Islam). Some of its militants joined the SS *Handjar* ("Dagger") Division, raised among Bosnian Muslims by Amin al-Husseini, the mufti of Jerusalem and ally of the Third Reich. A youth group, under the name *Mladi Muslimani* (Young Muslims), was organized in 1941, with the region in the throes of the Second World War. Following liberation, the Titoist authorities dissolved *Al-Hidaje*, as they were in league with the Nazis. In 1949, *Mladi Muslimani's* luck also ran out, when four of its leaders were condemned to death and its members arrested. The parallel with the fate of the Egyptian Brotherhood during this epoch continued when one of those jailed in 1949, Alija Izetbegović, published a manifesto titled *Islamic declaration* in 1970—the year Nasser died. It addressed some of the topics in the *Signposts* of Sayyid Qutb, which had been published in Egypt five years earlier. After Nasser and Tito became allies in the Non-Aligned Movement, a few Bosnian Muslims went to Cairo, where some of them learned Arabic. They also discreetly familiarized themselves with the Brotherhood's clandestine networks on the banks of the Nile.

In the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution and Tito's death in 1983, Izetbegović was imprisoned again as one of thirteen individuals tried for "Islamic fundamentalism." In 1990, with Yugoslavia falling apart, he founded the SDA (Democratic Action Party) whose original name, Muslim Party of Yugoslavia, the authorities vetoed. Immediately afterward, he would be elected president of the Bosnia-Herzegovina entity. He did not run on an Islamist platform, but as a politician of the Muslim faith. In a context of heightened communitarian identities, Izetbegović won the votes of his fellow Muslims, who, while for the most part fairly secularized, were besieged by Serb and Croatian militias. As the elaborate certainties of Titoism melted away, Izetbegović benefited from his aura of having been persecuted. He came to incarnate the identity of the threatened Bosnian Muslims, but, unlike Algeria's FIS, his party did not amalgamate any social movement of an Islamist character. The SDA was mostly implanted in the medium-sized towns and rural areas, while the most secularized Sarajevo elites formerly educated in Titoism did not vote for him. The SDA had no notions of implementing sharia, but its leader had a history of friendships in the Middle East's Islamist movement. Faced with Serb atrocities and the genocidal pressure of ethnic cleansing, Izetbegović accepted urgently needed military and financial aid from the international Islamization players. These attempted to turn the last Balkan war of the twentieth century into a jihad, with Sunni and Shiites vying for control. It was a process not unlike the one at work in the Syrian civil war from 2011 onwards, as we shall see below.

Iran, which had been one of the targets, along with the former USSR, of the jihad waged under Sunni leadership in Afghanistan, now detected an opportunity in Bosnia. By devising a Bosnian jihad and its internationalization under the aegis of Teheran, Iran figured on recapturing a leading role in the global Islamization process from which the Shiites had been excluded. What was more, the Iranian Revolution, with its "modern" character, had resonated more favorably in the SDA ranks than archaic Wahhabism, as was reflected in the 1983 trial. Thus, from 1992 on, Iranian weaponry was shipped to Sarajevo via Croatia; several hundred *pasdaran*—or Iranian Revolutionary Guards—were deployed to Bosnia, just as in Lebanon in 1982; and Iranian cultural centers opened in the main Bosnian or mixed-ethnicity towns, Mostar among them. Teheran became more active in the Organization of the Islamic Conference, shaking up the Saudi leadership it accused of rendering aid half-heartedly to the persecuted Muslims in Bosnia. Riyadh had a reason

for holding back: it was reluctant to engage on European territory. As for the Sunni capitals, they now cast a much more critical eye than they did in the Afghan era on mounting a new worldwide jihad. Ten years earlier, by contrast, they were eager to get rid of their homegrown jihadists by shipping them off to Afghanistan. Ever since, the "Arab Afghans," upon their return home to Algeria and Egypt, had spearheaded resurgent jihadist violence against the state. Aid to Bosnia was thus strictly limited and confined to tightly rationed humanitarian assistance to avoid any sort of ideological contagion. No appeal to global jihad was launched under the authority of the Saudi senior ulema, nor was massive incentive financing provided. The CIA furnished even less support. Saudi aid to Bosnia was estimated at 150 million U.S. dollars, a pittance compared with the four billion dollars minimum spent on Afghanistan during the preceding decade.

On the other hand, some two thousand veteran Salafist jihadis converged on Bosnia, most of them natives of the Arabian Peninsula and Egypt. They were integrated into the "*Al-Mudzahidun*" brigade of the Bosnian army that fought fiercely against the Serb militias. The propaganda images of the two sides rivaled each other in savagery (in a way that would be replicated, only worse, in the Islamic State's videos twenty years later) as they paraded in some cases with the cut-off heads of their enemies. The jihadists presented themselves as saviors standing between their Bosnian fellow Muslims and extermination by the "crusaders." However, the jihad did not transplant well to the Balkans, despite aggressive Salafist proselytizing by the fighters. They conceived of themselves as fighting on conquered territory and having been called upon to "straighten out" a Balkan Islam steeped in mysticism and syncretism, but they managed to convert few Bosnians. Another factor in the failure of jihad to take root were the Dayton accords, which re-established peace. Signed December 15, 1995 on the initiative of the United States and Europe, they provided for the departure of "foreign volunteers." Nevertheless, despite its failure, the Bosnian jihad would act as an unprecedented example: in parallel with the spillover of the Algerian jihad to French soil, it indicated that Europe could serve as a battlefield of the Islamization process, with weapons in hand and terrorism as the vector. On March 29, 1996, jihadist returnees from Bosnia, in the act of planning an attack, were rousted from a hideout in the northern French town of Roubaix on the Belgian border. Several were killed in the building, and another was killed by Belgian gendarmes as he tried to escape.

For the next twenty years, their jailed ringleader would keep in contact with the new generation of jihadists in Northern France. The Franco-Belgian axis would be behind the killings in 2015, in particular the massacre of November 13 at the Bataclan and the Stade de France.

The Jihadization of the Palestinian Conflict

The Israeli-Palestinian confrontation was another conflict that would be substantially "jihadized" during the 1990s. Despite appearances created by Palestinian autonomy and the return of Yasser Arafat, Hamas was rising. Aligned with Lebanese Hezbollah and its Iranian mentor, it captured the imagination linked to the main "Arab cause" by fitting it into the Islamization of politics. Hamas escalated the vocabulary of radicalism with a spasm of suicide attacks to counter Netanyahu's tightening of Israeli policies and stepped-up settlement. This would furnish the model that al-Qaeda later perfected as its favored mode of action with regards to international jihadism.

The 1990–1991 Gulf War had weakened both the PLO and Israel, forcing the adversaries to sit down at the negotiating table. It so happened that Saddam Hussein, in lofting Scud missiles at the Jewish state, had jolted awake a "Palestinian street" dejected by the inertia on the part of Arab leaders. Suddenly, they could imagine a return to the grand Nasserite narrative of eliminating the Zionist enemy by military force. By annexing Kuwait, Saddam could pose as a new Arab oil giant who would use his immense fortune to that end. It earned him Arafat's enthusiastic backing. The defeat of Saddam's armies had weakened the dictator considerably, notably by making the Kurdish areas autonomous. Nevertheless, the international coalition of Operation Desert Storm had allowed him to remain in power in Baghdad. The rationale was to keep the Shiite majority from controlling Iraq (which it would end up doing anyway a decade later, after the United States and allies invaded the country in 2003).

The Kuwait disaster impacted the PLO severely; its subsidies were abruptly cut as the Gulf petromonarchies retaliated by showering their largesse on Hamas instead. And the PLO's ally of last resort, the USSR, no longer had superpower status since the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. As for the state of Israel, it was dissuaded from retaliating for the Iraqi

Scuds, for fear of the Arabs overcoming their division to stand with Baghdad against a "Zionist" offensive and complicate the coalition's task. The United States under George H. W. Bush, the "oilman" of American presidents, thus took the wind out of Israel's sails and sent it to the negotiating table holding a weak hand.

For the United States, all this combined into an enticing perspective. First of all, Washington hoped it would put an end to the Israeli-Palestinian irritant. The petromonarchies, saved *in extremis* from the Iraqi threat by American soldiers in stark contrast to the 1973 war, were forced to stow their oil weapons and toe the line set by the White House. After Jimmy Carter had presided over the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty in 1979 and taken Cairo off the battlefield, the entourage around President Bush senior expected him to neutralize the PLO as a nuisance factor. At the same time, the expectation grew that he would relativize the influence of pro-Israel elements in the U.S. Congress. (His attempts to do so would earn him their hostility and cost him the 1992 election.) Hence, he had exceptional leverage for reaching an Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement. This hope was distilled into the Madrid Conference in December 1991, in which a Palestinian representative with unofficial links to the PLO participated as part of the Jordanian delegation. Meanwhile Arafat's organization kept losing ground to an up-and-coming Hamas.

The Islamist movement was consolidating its inroads into the pious middle classes, most notably through elections to chambers of commerce. But it also provided an outlet for the poor urban youth radicalized by an Intifada that had come up short. This led to an increase in assassinations of Israeli civilians and soldiers. On December 13, 1992, an Israeli non-commissioned officer was kidnapped at Lod. When he was found two days later in the West Bank, stabbed to death with his hands tied, it triggered the arrest of 417 Hamas and Islamic Jihad leaders and activists. Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin had them deported to South Lebanon, to the mountain village of Marj az Zuhor, where, standing in the snow, they received the international press. Islamist engineers, medical doctors, and professors gave interviews in fluent English denouncing Israel's policy and the compromises made by the PLO. In their makeshift camp, they had organized an "Ibn Taimiyya University" (named after the most rigorous ulema in the Sunni tradition, an inspiration for contemporary Islamist radicals), and had established especially fruitful relations with Hezbollah, whose roots ran

deep in this Shiite zone. Hamas would draw inspiration from the strategy of the "Party of God," and would become persuaded of the effectiveness of suicide attacks and strengthened ties with the Islamic Republic.

The resulting international scandal culminated in a resolution in the UN Security Council demanding repatriation of the deportees. It also set in motion the symbolic shift that let Hamas achieve parity with, if not primacy over, the PLO in embodying the Palestinian cause and, consequently, the Islamization of its Arab and global image. To save the game, the PLO that same December entered into direct, secret talks with Israel. These would conclude in the so-called Oslo Accords, whose "declaration of principles" was signed on September 13, 1993 by Arafat and Rabin at the White House with U.S. President Bill Clinton's blessing. By embodying the Palestinian dream of regaining an autonomous territory on the West Bank and in Gaza, the nationalist organization counted on deriving considerable political benefit from the accords. Instead, the PLO ended up weakened by the one-sided conditions imposed by Israel, the many obstacles to complying with them, and the settlements sprawl on the West Bank. On February 25, 1994, when a Jewish settler massacred more than thirty Muslims at prayer in the Hebron mosque, Hamas turned vengeance for the victims into a populist blank check. In the ensuing months, the first suicide attacks on the Jewish population resulted in more than ten dead, setting off a new cycle of repression. But, Palestine having achieved autonomy in July, it now fell to the Palestinian security forces performing police duties in the Autonomous Territories in Israel's stead to counter the Hamas activists. The first clash occurred on November 18, when the PLO riot squads opened fire on Gaza demonstrators as they emerged from the mosque. Arafat's moral status with the Arab masses suffered considerably because of this incident.

Yitzhak Rabin's assassination on November 4, 1995 by a Jewish activist opposed to the Oslo Accords deprived the PLO chief of his principal Israeli political partner. The following January, the Hamas bomb maker, "The Engineer" Yahia Ayyach, founder of the Ezzedin al-Qassam brigades and suicide-attack strategizer, was killed. His cell phone exploded, a hit attributed to Israeli intelligence. Retaliation took the form of spectacular new attacks that killed sixty-three Israelis. The result was a Likud Party electoral victory in May 1996, bringing to power Benjamin Netanyahu with his discourse of toughness against the Palestinians and an accelerated settlement program. The suicide attacks increased into 1998, resuming

even more forcefully when the second Intifada started in 2000. Beyond the political twists and turns on Palestinian terrain, this jihadist terror strategy hinged on the "martyr operation." It was valued from now on as the supreme weapon for bringing high visibility and absolute legitimacy to anyone who wanted to battle Israel first and the West second. It was left to Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda to raise this type of Islamic terrorism to a global scale. And, on September 11, 2001, they did so by projecting it from the territory of the "Zionist enemy" to the United States itself.

THREE

The Second Jihadist Phase

Against the Distant Enemy (1998–2005)

Osama bin Laden and the Creation of al-Qaeda

After fleeing Saudi Arabia in 1991, bin Laden hid out at first in Afghanistan. But the violent feuds between mujahideen commanders there proved too dangerous for him, and he decamped the following year to Sudan. The Islamists had taken power there in June 1989, with General Omar al-Bashir and his *éminence grise* Hassan al-Turabi running the show. A mass of jihadists who had fought in Afghanistan and were unable to return to their native countries joined bin Laden in exile there. His first priority, meanwhile, was to make an explicit final break with Saudi Arabia and organize the autonomous movement that would become "Salafist jihadism." It would be distinct from the "Salafist sheikhism" that owed allegiance to the Riyadh monarchy.

This internal schism in Sunni Salafism would resolve the ambiguities on which the alliances of the Afghan jihad had been built. Back then, a wide spectrum of "strange bedfellows" had collaborated, running the gamut from the CIA and the oil kingdoms to al-Qaeda. Subsequently, the jihads in Algeria, Egypt, and Bosnia would not get one iota of American support. And, in Algeria, the military leaders even solicited fatwas from the Saudi senior ulema, who would certify them as good Muslims. This would yank the rug of legitimacy out from under the Islamic Armed Group (GIA), who, inspired by both the war of independence against the French and the Afghan jihad,

had intended to lead a jihad against the generals. In Bosnia, the Western armies and intelligence services got involved directly in evicting the jihadist "foreign volunteers" from Bosnian soil, starting in 1995.

The distilled jihadism of the 1990s thus proceeded to substitute the United States for the USSR, now on the ash heap of history, as its major enemy. However, acquiring this new target necessitated the forging of different alliances. The timing of bin Laden's Sudanese exile—from 1992 to 1996—was propitious for effecting this major reversal. On April 25, 1991, al-Turabi, who had praised Saddam Hussein, convened the first of four "Arab and Islamic popular conferences." These provided a venue until 1995 where all the losers and outcasts from Operation Desert Storm could meet and commiserate. The Salafist jihadis would no longer be rubbing shoulders with CIA agents, but with anti-Zionist Arab nationalists, anti-imperialists, and other Third World militants instead. In the resulting petri dish would grow the radical "Islamic Leftism" of the coming decades. It would let Islamist terrorism in its various forms take advantage of being indulged by part of the extreme left. The Venezuelan-born Illitch Ramirez Sanchez, aka Carlos, the former leftist terrorist forced into retirement by the loss of his sources of support in the Soviet world, embodied this new, paradoxical alliance. He converted to Islam and lived in obscurity in Khartoum in 1993 before being abducted the following year by French intelligence. Sitting out a life sentence in his prison cell in the Paris region, he watched the jihadists work toward actualizing the cause he had fought for in the name of Marx and Lenin.

The anti-American swing of the jihadism pendulum manifested itself in the opening of two fronts simultaneously. Whether or not they were coordinated or simply coincidental has not been determined to date for want of access to relevant classified information. In December 1992, with growing chaos in Somalia, the United Nations sent a military contingent made up mostly of American troops to restore order and alleviate famine. The Islamist movement perceived this operation, initially named "Restore Hope," as a pretext for establishing a bridgehead on the Horn of Africa for a future attack on Sudan. A number of jihadists training in Afghanistan joined the Somali faction led by General Mohamed Farrah Aidid in fire-fights with the American troops. Following an attack on two helicopters on October 3 and 4 which left seventeen American soldiers dead, President Clinton responded by recalling his troops. At the time, he was confronting

a so-called "Vietmalia" syndrome (fears of another Vietnam war) on the home front.

This was the first armed jihadist engagement against the United States in an East African theater of operations, and a prelude to the attacks against the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998. It had, however, been preceded by the first attack on the World Trade Center on February 26, 1993, a complex affair still shrouded in mystery, despite the consecutive trial and life sentence of the key defendant, the jihadist Egyptian sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman (who died in 2017, imprisoned in the United States). He was one of the major imams of radical Egyptian Islamism in the 1970 and 1980s, having authored a fatwa declaring anyone sinless who looted and spilled the blood of Copts.

Imprisoned until 1984 after Sadat's assassination in October 1981, Abdel Rahman had been granted an American visa at the CIA's behest. Traveling between the United States and Peshawar, he became one of the great charismatic Islamist figures, recruiting fighters across the globe for the Afghan jihad. He then returned to his country, but the Mubarak regime had him in its sights because he was the emir of the Egyptian *gam'a islamiyya*. He fled to al-Turabi's Sudan in April 1990, where he once more was issued an American visa. He returned to the United States on July 18, where he obtained his green card with exceptional speed the following April, as the minister of religion in the Jersey City mosque. However, starting in June 1991 when he made his pilgrimage to Mecca, among many other international trips, his residency status came under scrutiny. The grounds: failure to declare his bigamy. To avoid deportation, he filed an application for political asylum in June 1992.

The troubled circumstances behind the deterioration of the Sheikh's relationship with the American intelligence universe remain unclear to this day. But they lead back to the origins of the project to attack the World Trade Center—these manifested in the first instance as a milieu of Egyptian immigrants infiltrated by undercover agents. In the second instance, on February 26, 1993 in the garage beneath the Twin Towers, an explosive-laden van exploded. The ringleader, a close associate of the Sheikh by the name of Ramzi Yousef and holder of an Iraqi passport, would ultimately be arrested in Pakistan, extradited to the United States, and sentenced without all the facts against him laid out in court, giving rise to myriad conspiracy theories. Looking back (all the more so after the main attack on 9/11 would

target the World Trade Center again), the operation of February 26, 1993 was unquestionably the last straw. It signaled the final, operative rupture of the alliance between jihadists and the American intelligence services that had made the Afghanistan operation possible.

Bin Laden, for his part, did not feel entirely secure in Khartoum either. The regime of General al-Bashir and his mentor Hassan al-Turabi was subjected to multiple international pressures. These intensified after an assassination attempt on Mubarak during the June 1995 Addis Ababa summit was traced to Egyptian jihadists based in neighboring Sudan. Another forboding event was the capture of Carlos the previous year by the French secret services, with the discreet assent of the Sudanese authorities.

On November 13, 1995, a car bomb exploded in Riyadh in front of a National Guard building, killing five American military advisors. And on June 25, 1996, the blast from a truck packed with explosives killed nineteen members of the United States military in Khobar, in Saudi Arabia's eastern oil fields. Bin Laden did not claim credit for these attacks—as with 9/11, this was a tactic designed for maximizing the panic effect among his enemies, making it harder for them to retaliate. The second attack ultimately would be attributed by American law enforcement to a "Saudi Hezbollah" instigated by Iran. The principal suspect, Ahmed al-Mughassil, was arrested in Beirut and extradited to Saudi Arabia in August 2015.

Bin Laden's departure for a safer haven in Taliban territory helped cover his tracks when, in the summer of 1996, he returned to Afghanistan. There, he settled under the protection of Mullah Mohammed Omar, whose movement controlled the entire southern part of the country in the run up to retaking the capital city of Kabul in September. Also, unlike the authorities in Sudan, Mullah Omar lacked any kind of relationship with the international community. Taliban officials ultimately confirmed that bin Laden's move had been facilitated by an agreement between the Americans and the Sudanese. His former American protectors did not want him to be captured and tried in the United States, like Carlos had been in France. The fear was that information would come to light during his trial that could prove embarrassing to them. The Sudanese wanted just as much to get rid of this global public enemy number one and obstacle to normalizing relations with the West. Moreover, Washington would have figured that this personage would pose a minimal threat bottled up and isolated inside Afghanistan.

Instead, starting on August 26, bin Laden would disseminate a "Declaration of Jihad against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Mosques [Mecca and Medina]." It became better known by its subtitle taken from the celebrated saying (*hadith*) attributed to the Prophet: "Expel the Jews and the Christians from the Arabian Peninsula." These eleven pages make up the inaugural manifesto of what would ultimately develop into the al-Qaeda organization. As indicated by the title, at this stage the objective was still the "liberation" of Saudi Arabia. In it, bin Laden praised the Khobar attack two months earlier, but also rejoiced over the "victory" in Somalia—two operations he had not explicitly claimed to be his. In this way, he positioned himself as actually continuing the Afghan jihad. He could now effectively argue that the Saudi kingdom was being occupied by the unbeliever armies of the United States, just as Afghanistan had been by the USSR. Then he took up again, word for word, the appeal by Abdullah Azzam calling on the world's Muslims to fulfill their individual duty (*fard 'ayn*) by taking part in a "defensive jihad" for liberating the usurped land of Islam. As it turned out, his declaration had no effect; in contrast to the call to jihad in Afghanistan, bin Laden could only muster feeble support for it. The Afghanistan jihad had enjoyed a broad consensus among Salafist ulemas and Muslim Brothers, as well as support from a majority of the Organization for the Islamic Conference's member states. Now, bin Laden only had in his corner Azzam (killed in 1989); Ahmed Yassin, the Palestinian sheikh who founded Hamas; his Egyptian colleague Omar Abdel Rahman, imprisoned in the United States; and the Saudi sheikhs Salman al-Audah and Safar al-Hawali, also sitting behind bars in their own country. Nevertheless, the American troops were eventually withdrawn from Saudi bases and moved to Qatar—but not until seven years later, in the summer of 2003.

On February 23, 1998, a new line was crossed in transitioning to the al-Qaeda global brand of international jihadism. On this date, bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri co-signed, with some relatively unknown jihadists from Egypt and the Indian subcontinent, the founding charter of a "World Islamic Front for Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders." Since bin Laden's "Declaration" of August 26, 1996, the state of jihadism inspired by Afghanistan had deteriorated considerably: in the fall of 1997, the jihads in Algeria and Egypt had ended with a whimper after five years of fighting. To prevent this from happening again, bin Laden and al-Zawahiri included a fatwa in their charter specifying that "every Muslim capable of carrying it out has the

individual duty [*fard ʿayn*] to kill Americans and their civilian and military allies, in all countries where this is possible."

This call to arms reaped results: on August 7, 1998, two simultaneous attacks destroyed the American embassies in Nairobi (Kenya) and Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), causing, respectively, 213 dead (twelve of them Americans) and more than 4,500 wounded, and 11 dead (none of them Americans) with 85 wounded. The modus operandi of this terrorist operation bore what would become the al-Qaeda signature: do not mention the name, pick a symbolic date, and stage a series of simultaneous attacks in various places. In this case, the date was the seventh anniversary of the appeal by King Fahd for the stationing of American troops in Saudi territory to deter Saddam Hussein. And although he celebrated the operations in follow-up press interviews, bin Laden did not credit them to al-Qaeda. The conspicuous timing of the attacks was enough to signal a causality, making an explicit claim of responsibility unnecessary. The primary object was to boost the shock effect on the enemy, by creating the impression that they were beset from all sides, thus maximizing the sense of dread.

The United States responded quickly: on August 20, a salvo of cruise missiles fired from an aircraft carrier in the Indian Ocean destroyed a chemical products factory in Khartoum. They also hit a camp for Pakistani jihadists in Afghanistan training to fight in Indian Kashmir. None of them touched bin Laden or anyone close to him. In fact, his solidarity with the "martyrs" elevated him to veritable cult figure status in Pakistan. In the following months, everywhere in the bazaars I saw t-shirts for sale emblazoned with the image of the soon-to-be world-famous Saudi.

Now champion of the Islamist cause, bin Laden had invented a new style of asymmetrical warfare against the West. While it featured elements borrowed from Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon, like the embassy attacks and suicide bombings, it transformed their finality. This type of terrorism was not carried out *in fine* by a state striving for identifiable outcomes geared to circumstances, as, for example, Iran, anxious to loosen the military vise grip on its territory, did during the Iran-Iraq war. The masterminds formed a complex network not precisely categorizable or identifiable with certainty, whose contours shifted, whose objectives were maximalist and non-negotiable. It ran circles around Western military arrays. This applied especially to the operations designed to strike "hard" targets such as cities and infrastructures geared to a now obsolete conflict with the USSR.

The U.S. cruise missile strike of August 20 may have been remarkably precise in ballistic terms, but politically it was a dud. In October 2000, al-Qaeda attacked again. This time, an inflatable dinghy loaded to the gunwales with explosives rammed the side of the American destroyer USS Cole refueling at Aden. The explosion killed seventeen sailors. From now on, the enemy would be supple and elusive; it would take years to reverse engineer al-Qaeda's "software" and take a different approach to the misnamed "War against Terror"—with the aim of finding and neutralizing bin Laden. On May 2, 2011, an American Special Forces troop tracked him to his compound in Pakistan and killed him—thirteen years after he had proclaimed the "World Islamic Front."

Knights Under the Prophet's Banner

On December 2, 2001, three months after the "blessed double raid" of September 11, 2001 against New York and Washington D.C., an Arab daily paper serialized extracts from a work by Ayman al-Zawahiri titled *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*. Even if the provenance of the text remains somewhat controversial, al-Zawahiri and his associates have never disavowed it. References in the opening paragraphs to Afghanistan and Chechnya as two countries liberated in the name of jihad make it likely that the work had been written between 1997 and 1999. This would date it after the election of Aslan Maskhadov as the Chechen president, and before Grozny was retaken by Russian troops in January 2000.

During those three years, jihadist groups had ruled large swaths of Chechen territory. These dates also bracket al-Zawahiri's sojourn at bin Laden's side with the Taliban in Afghanistan—the other territory "liberated by jihad." In a sense, his book is the Islamist reflection of Samuel Huntington's 1996 bestseller *The Clash of Civilizations*. Liberal Western intellectuals were unsparing in their criticism of a work that seemed to reduce "civilizations" to their supposed essences, while negating the hybridization of postmodern societies. Al-Zawahiri, on the contrary, approved of the Harvard professor's logic, as did most Islamists. He viewed it as a fair demonstration by an adversary of the radical incompatibility of Islam, as seen through the jihadist prism, and the West. Al-Zawahiri was content to simply invert the positives and negatives assigned to these two contexts of

meaning in the original book and point out what it would take for Islam's inevitable triumph over the planet.

The title *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner* refers to the victories won by the armies of Mahomet (Mohammed) and the first caliphs in spreading "the religion of Allah" across the world until it "submitted completely." It aligned the objectives of the jihadists with the same trajectory as Sayyid Qutb's manifesto *Signposts* (1965) and Abdullah Azzam's *Join the Caravan* (about 1985). The real significance of this text, however, resides in the strategy it crafted for the armed Islamist movement at the pivotal juncture of the final years of the 1990s. It constructed a critical balance sheet, drew lessons from it, and effected a major strategic redirection for projecting jihad "to the land of the enemy" in the future. This change of objective was executed at the same time as al-Zawahiri wrote his text. First came the warning shots: the attacks on the American forces stationed on Saudi Arabia's "Land of the two Holy Mosques" in Riyadh in late 1995. Next came the three attacks aimed at the United States embassies in Kenya and Tanzania on August 7, 1998, and on the Cole in Aden harbor on October 12, 2000. The message was clear, to be repeated emphatically on 9/11.

Al-Zawahiri's reflections were based on specific, recent elements. Most notably, he dwelled on the failure of Algerian Islamism, beaten in fine by soldiers of the "party of France." He was well informed about the movement's development, via groups of supporters who had taken refuge in "Londonistan" under the wing of Abu Musab al-Suri, editor of the *Al-Ansar* bulletin. Al-Zawahiri blamed the failure of the Algerian experiment on the inability to mobilize the masses on a concept of struggle that was too elitist. A way had to be found, therefore, to stir the people up by appealing to emotions that would let them find a common cause with the jihadists. However, the Arab and Muslim masses were stoked primarily about the Palestinian cause, which the nationalists had monopolized for too long. Islamizing it via Hamas and Islamic Jihad and the multiplying "martyr operations" generated precious symbolic capital. The political economics of suicide attacks were optimal, in effect, as measured by the ratio between their low costs and the media reverberations that they set off.

Ultimately, the war had to be taken into the heart of the United States in imitation of the martyr operations carried out in Israel. This created an explicit parallel between the territory of the Jewish state as a legitimate target of jihad and that of the West, for which Israel so far had been a stand-in.

It was captured operatively by the phrase "Zionist-Crusader" (*sahiou-salibi*), improvised by al-Zawahiri for designating and circumscribing the enemy. Below, we will discuss the raising of the second Palestinian Intifada from September 2000 on, whose mounting violence resulted in several thousand Palestinians and Israelis dead. As we shall see, it proved to be an extremely favorable context for projecting a jihad globally. It would eventually execute its tactical weapon of "martyrdom operations" practiced on Jewish soil against the Pentagon and the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center.

Al-Zawahiri also got in the middle of an ongoing debate within the Islamist movement on whether the fight against the "near enemy" (*al-ʿadou al-qarib*) or against the "distant enemy" (*al-ʿadou al-baʿid*) should have priority. Choosing Israel to fight had made sense for the nationalist adversaries of the Islamists. Nasser, for example, had instrumentalized this climate of an anti-Zionist Sacred Union to reinforce his absolute rule and violently repress the Islamists. The jihadist awakening of the 1980s had targeted the near enemy instead—from Sadat's assassination in 1981 to jihad in Algeria—but the masses had failed to follow. Al-Zawahiri therefore hoped to resume the fight against the distant enemy, that is, Israel and the West. He made himself no illusions about destroying them immediately. Instead, he wanted to galvanize the masses so they would look to the jihadists as their champions and enlist under their banner to help overturn the "apostate" regimes of the Muslim world later. This dialectical detour by the author, which sidesteps the contrast between the two enemies in order to subrogate one to the other, is the key to interpreting 9/11.

Looking back, we can date the transition between the first and second phases of contemporary jihadism from February 23, 1998, with the publication of the charter of the "World Islamic Front for Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders." Instead of prioritizing the "near enemy" regimes in Afghanistan, Algeria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, etc., the target of choice from now on would be a "distant enemy:" the United States. This shift, theorized in *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, was soon translated on the ground. This occurred during the months between the end of the Algerian and Egyptian jihads (in September and November 1997, respectively) and the two United States embassy attacks on the symbolic date of August 7, 1998. At the time, there lacked the necessary context to think of this rupture as strategic, for al-Zawahiri's text had not yet been disseminated. It was far-fetched to think that a band of individuals signing the charter on February 23, isolated deep

in the Hindu Kush mountains under Taliban "emirate" protection, would be capable of mounting an operation as audacious and improbable as 9/11.

The Addition of the Second Intifada

On September 28, 2000, General Ariel Sharon, the Likud party's candidate for prime minister of Israel, went for an ostentatious "stroll" on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Politically, the site was off-limits for Israelis, since it also holds the Noble Sanctuary (*al masjid al aqsa* and the Dome of the Rock), which is holy to Muslims. This deliberate thumb in the eye of Muslims, which Sharon's partisans hailed as a success, occurred two months before the American presidential election that would see Bill Clinton, the godfather of the Oslo Accords, exit the White House. The objective of the stunt, pure and simple, was to undermine the peace logic that had emerged from those difficult negotiations. It had the intended effect immediately, because the demonstrations that erupted the next day were put down with tear gas and rubber bullets, ultimately resulting in bloodshed. This caused Arafat to call for a second uprising, known as the Al-Aqsa (the Arab name of the principal mosque in the Sanctuary) Intifada. Filmed as it happened, the death of twelve-year-old Mohammed al-Durah, killed on September 30 in Gaza in his father's arms, was televised around the world. The intense feeling it aroused quickly inflamed both the Intifada's mobilization and its repression. Arafat, for his part, also needed to shore up his legitimacy after seven years of setbacks. Israeli settlements had continued, legal sanctions designed to strangle the Palestinian economy had multiplied, statehood had repeatedly been postponed, and so on. He needed to provide an outlet for Gaza and West Bank youth, especially those in the camps, who derived no benefit from autonomy. They might at any moment desert the PLO and line up en masse behind Hamas and the Islamic Jihad instead.

At first, the *tanzim*, the Fatah militia organization, limited the Intifada to violence toward the military and the settlements. The aim was to pressure the Israeli electorate into renouncing the settlement policy in return for having peace restored. Arab opinion at the time was convinced that Israel, whose army had just abandoned South Lebanon after occupying it since 1978, had been forced to retreat by a series of Hezbollah suicide attacks. The thought was that similar pressure in Israeli territory would be that much

more effective. At Camp David in July 2000, during Bill Clinton's lame-duck presidency, the last time Arafat met Prime Minister Ehud Barak, he therefore insisted again on the right of return for all Palestinians. Just affirming this principle—even if prospects for implementing it were nil—drove most of Israeli society away from their support of the peace talks. This made a rightward shift easier for Jewish voters, who saw in Arafat a lethal menace to the survival of the Jewish state. Ariel Sharon thus triumphed in the elections of February 2001. He was further comforted by the arrival of George W. Bush to the White House, whose neoconservative advisors were in sync with Likud's positions—with a mandate to get rid of Arafat. When he smashed the *tanzim* apparatus, Sharon facilitated the rise to power of Hamas and of the Islamic Jihad group. Far from restricting violence to Israeli military and settlements, these organizations launched indiscriminate, spectacular attacks on buses and markets to raise the number of civilian casualties.

In the Sunni world, the lawfulness of suicide bombings had been controversial among the ulema going back to 1996. In that year, when bin Laden published his "Declaration of Jihad," Qatar-based Al Jazeera satellite TV started broadcasting. From the start, it gave immense public exposure to the attacks as "martyrdom operations" by broadcasting the images around the world. However, the Saudi senior ulema, with one eye on the threat bin Laden posed for the monarchy, unequivocally condemned them. They ruled that Allah alone can decide to take back the life he has given, and that suicides are punished in hell.

The opposite view was broadcast by the top Al Jazeera "TV Koranist," the Egyptian-born sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a naturalized Qatari and leading international Muslim Brotherhood figure. He fully supported the attacks, especially in light of the fact that Hamas represented the Palestinian branch of his movement. In a well-reasoned fatwa that appeared in March 1996 and would be republished and completed at the time of the Second Intifada, the sheikh depicted these operations as "the most glorious form of jihad in the way of Allah." He saw them as forming part of the "legitimate terrorism" provided for by the words of the Almighty in the Koran (*al-irhab al-mashruʿ*):

> And prepare against [the unbelievers] whatever you are able of power and steeds of war by which you may terrorize the enemy of Allah and your enemy.
>
> [Surah 8 "The Bounties," verse: 60]

This literal interpretation of the verb "to terrorize" takes it out of context in a history-distorting logic that is unique to the fallacious arguments of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists. It serves to justify terrorism by calling it legitimate, as a "mode of defense of the disinherited so that they can resist the omnipotence of the mighty and the arrogant." By stating it this way, Yusuf al-Qaradawi took up the vocabulary of the Iranian revolution for the occasion. As for killing Israeli civilians, it was lawful because all Israelis, male and female, served in uniform; in reality, the Jewish state was only made up of soldiers who *ipso facto* constituted just targets.

Al-Qaradawi's fatwa, because of its author's notoriety, was the most important one issued by a Sunni religious authority, and it came to inspire many emulations. Thus, it served an organizing function for the Great Narrative of terror and of martyrdom. Thereafter, in the Muslim world, and foremost for the Al Jazeera TV audience, it became the reference grid for all the conflicts that could happen anywhere on the planet. Martyred Palestine, the victim of Zionist oppression in the face of Western indifference, would always feature in the resistance as a symbol of Islamic struggle par excellence—but from now on, it had been captured by jihad whose favored mode of attack was suicide bombing.

The toll taken by the Second Intifada reached more than 4,000 dead over five years of clashes—and, for the first time, a quarter of the total were Israelis. The Intifada came to a close with the construction of an impassable wall to separate the Jewish state from the Palestinian territories, but left the latter mired in economic and social decline. Arafat's death in a French hospital on November 11, 2004, signaled the end of an era: in January 2006, Hamas carried the Palestinian elections, and, after a face-off with Fatah, in June 2007 it took full powers in Gaza. It would hold on to them for a decade until the Palestinian Authority partially returned to the territory in October 2017, though it would remain the inexpugnable stronghold of the Palestinian Islamist movement.

The 9/11 Cataclysm

A number of warning signs preceded this, the most spectacular event of the nascent twenty-first century—and third millennium—which foisted the jihadism conceived by bin Laden and al-Zawahiri as a key narrative in the

chaotic post–Cold War world. But it also impinged on the juncture of far vaster symbolic meanings, giving it an unprecedented resonance. While it profoundly changed the geopolitics of the Middle East by fanning the West's "War against Terror" that led to the fall of Saddam Hussein, it also had the perverse effect of tilting Iraq into the Shiite camp and moving it closer to Teheran. This was a defeat ironically shared by both Sunni jihadists and the United States to the benefit of their mutual enemy, the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, there was a bright side: after 9/11, despite the multiplying, smaller-scale attacks modeled on it, whose targets ranged from Bali to Madrid to London, the realization dawned that "jihad against the distant enemy" had failed to rally the Muslim masses to al-Qaeda's banner. Failure to achieve this goal paved the way for yet another new phase of jihadism, which would call into question the very strategy of which the spectacular 9/11 was the linchpin.

As the world soon learned, nineteen kamikaze jihadists carried out the attack on board four airliners hijacked and diverted to New York and Washington to crash into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and the Capitol. Only a revolt by the passengers on board the aircraft aimed at the Capitol kept it from being hit. Above all, the attack implemented the objective specified in the charter of the "World Islamic Front for Jihad Against the Jews and Crusaders" in February 1998: bring the war to the West. The theoretical grounding was found in al-Zawahiri's *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*. But it also registered in continuity with the Palestinian Second Intifada, which was then crystalizing the political feelings of the Arab and Muslim worlds. The 9/11 attack was to be its global projection.

Whereas Hamas and the Islamic Jihad killed bus passengers, market shoppers, and customers of cafés and pizzerias in Israel by the dozens, al-Qaeda massacred occupants of the Twin Towers in the United States by the thousands. However, this projection did not suit all actors or supporters of the Palestinian cause, who suddenly found themselves taken hostage by a fight in which they were outmatched. Starting on September 12, Arafat had himself filmed and photographed giving blood for the victims in the United States. Even Sheikh al-Qaradawi strove to delink Israel's status—a Muslim territory occupied by infidels where the defensive jihad had been lawful—from the American continent, which had never been a "land of Islam." From this followed that the nineteen kamikazes could not invoke martyr status and had to be treated as suicides—so he maintained.

He had to, unless he wanted to cut all lines of communication between the Muslim Brotherhood and Washington (that would later prove so functional during Obama's presidency).

Why choose the World Trade Center as the most emblematic place for a second attack when it had already been done in 1993, which had earned Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman prison for life? It let al-Qaeda perpetuate the action that the blind Egyptian referent of the "Declaration of Jihad" of 1996 had been charged with, and to exact a kind of revenge for his life sentence in a United States prison. Also, by making the attack look like a rationally planned part of a continuing sequence, the gesture made an even stronger impact. But there was more to it still. While the 1993 attack's significance lay in its dramatizing the divorce between the United States intelligence services and the jihadist parties of the 1980s after they had been comrades in arms against the Soviet Army in Afghanistan, it had not been finalized. Bin Laden and his confidants, by razing the Twin Towers, marked the break with their erstwhile American ally as definitive. It symbolically erased all traces of their earlier marriage of convenience and reconfigured their semantics.

From now on, jihad would fit into a long-term Islamic eschatology expressed in the phrase "blessed double raid" (*al-ghazwatayn al-moubarakatayn*), the terminology for the operation that al-Qaeda would use in all subsequent documents. By having the raids symbolize the audacity of knights fighting "under the Prophet's banner," this designation summoned up a Muslim fantasy that spanned the history of Islam. It harked back to Islam's earliest times, when the Prophet conquered empires that wielded vastly superior armies but were mired in ineffective bureaucracies. The fantasy also fit the fates of New York and Washington into the history of Constantinople: the American empire would inevitably fall under the blows of jihad like its Byzantine predecessor did in 1453, even if it took centuries. Invoking this grand narrative of finality, as we have seen, is consistent with the parallel drawn between the Soviet Union, defeated after the withdrawal of the Soviet Army from Kabul on February 15 1989 (leading to the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9), and the destruction of the Sassanid empire in 636 at the battle of Qadisiyya.

Jihadism wanted to affirm itself as nothing less than the key actor in the international system, like seventh-century Islam was in the aftermath of the Prophecy. It would do so by reviving the religion's conquering mission,

grown stale over fourteen centuries of decadence and compromises. And the jihadists slipped contemporary challenges into this sacred history by substituting this new confrontation with "Zionist-Crusader" godlessness for the confrontation between NATO and the Warsaw Pact (which vanished with the USSR). They went on to set up this battle as the new organizing principle of the world—their way of referencing Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*.

This pretense of linking the Islamic finality doctrine with the end of the Cold War, as we saw earlier, ultimately feeds on the jihadists' numerological obsession that has them detecting the expression of divine providence in dates. In this instance, it relates 11/9/1989, the date of the fall of the Berlin Wall, symbolizing the end of the former Communist order, to that of the "blessed double raid" on 9/11/2001 as heralding the advent of the new Islamic order. These two events bracket the change of the Christian millennium and prefigure time shifting toward the Hegiric calendar. Finally, there is the choice of the nationality of the kamikazes, fifteen of which were subjects of Saudi Arabia. This was a deliberate choice, done to remind us of the aim of the jihadist saga that bin Laden extended to the entire planet: the fight against both the sacrilegious Saudi dynasty, which, on August 7, 1990, sullied the land "of the two Holy Mosques" with American troops, and simultaneously the one against the United States defiler. The prelude to 9/11 had played out fairly well on August 7, 1998, with the attacks on the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania occurring on the eighth anniversary of the day King Fahd had appealed to the United States for protection against Saddam Hussein's army—the first coinciding dates with value as a providential sign.

The conflict mode inaugurated on 9/11 hinges on three interlinked elements. First, there is the asymmetric dimension. It discards standard practices of armed combat between states by transmuting terrorism from an act of sedition into a true act of global warfare whose instruments and targets are civilians, as seen with the four airlines hijacked, the thousands of victims. Next, there is the staging, designed to maximize the media reverberations, to multiply to the nth degree the global effect of shocking the enemy and galvanizing potential supporters. In France, we had a telling example of the importance of media impact at the "Merah trial" in October 2017. It involved Abdelkader and Mohammed Merah, one-time

ordinary delinquents in a working-class housing estate in the southwestern city of Toulouse. On September 12, the day after they'd watched the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington, their eyes glued to the television in admiration, the brothers had gone out into the streets and shouted, "Long live bin Laden!". They gradually drifted into Salafist jihadism and, in Mohammed's case, graduated in March 2012 to murdering "apostate" French soldiers of Muslim descent and Jews.

The 9/11 display is something straight out of a Hollywood disaster film. It combines grand spectacle and explosions, adopting the conventions of action film blockbusters in a way that appealed to the public en masse. The sensational images screamed for coverage on the television news channels, but they still exposed an event that occurred squarely within the bounds of reality. Global retransmission is made possible by the proliferation of the satellite television channels dating to the mid-1990s onward, most notably Al Jazeera. More than any other, it would become the vector for broadcasting the images produced by al-Qaeda. This last element, the combination of terrorism as an act of war and its media staging, is deliberately provocative. It was designed to draw the Western armies into Afghanistan to be ambushed and beaten like the Soviets a dozen years earlier. Bin Laden and his entourage did not believe that 9/11 alone would destroy the United States, but that it would set in motion a process that would ultimately be devastating to the West.

In his manifesto, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, al-Zawahiri devotes several passages to the media battlefield. Although he never mentions the mastery displayed in this domain by the Islamic Republic of Iran—the Shiite competitor for Islamist hegemony—the influence of its techniques is obvious. The Sunni jihadists had been robbed of their glory when the Soviet retreat from Kabul went practically unnoticed due to Khomeini's shrewdly issuing a fatwa condemning Rushdie to death the day before, on February 14, 1989. Al-Qaeda had clearly absorbed those techniques and applied them to 9/11. The staging of the terrorist act, and its translation into the formatted language of the media, are essential preconditions for its publicity value, and thus its efficacy. In the end, this faith in the mobilizing virtue of the image, which still had to be televised during the opening years of the twenty-first century, as this was before the social media era, would rapidly founder on its limitations and make the al-Qaeda model obsolete.

Jihadist Mirror Image: "Neocons" and the "War on Terror"

9/11 occurred during the first year in the presidency of George W. Bush, the previous governor of the oil state of Texas who had surrounded himself by advisors, many of a neoconservative bent. These "neocons" were now faced with having to craft a response to al-Qaeda's provocation. Like the jihadists, Bush's neocons had felt vindicated by the final victory over the USSR in 1989. In their view, it was due to the "hard line" they consistently took against anyone tempted to appease Moscow under the conceit of "peaceful coexistence."

Like their Islamist adversaries, the neocons had a finality narrative. But in their case it was *The End of History*, as set out in the book of the same title by Francis Fukuyama, published in 1992. Fukuyama argued that Western liberal democracy is humanity's Hegelian, inevitable destiny. His theory finds its application first in the former Soviet "people's democracies" in central and eastern Europe. Once liberated by the fall of the Berlin Wall, they very quickly embraced liberalism, and most of them joined the European Union. For the neocons, this historical precedent could be applied globally, in particular to the Muslim world; all they needed was to field the means necessary to force this mutation. Four years later, Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* seemed to take the opposite tack to Fukuyama's work. In it, he stressed the specificity of civilizations hostile to those of the West—for which Islam (followed by Confucianism) constituted the model. The neocons synthesized these two theories, giving greater weight to a politico-military engagement that would set the stage, as they saw it, for transforming the Muslim world and setting it on the road to Western-style democracy.

To begin with, these radical right-wing intellectuals, many of them Jews, and also extreme leftists of the Trotskyite stripe in their youth, were preoccupied with the security of Israel threatened by Intifada. They were wary of the Oslo Accords. They suspected President George Bush Senior had put Israel in a position of weakness, and they faulted Bill Clinton for having strong-armed the Jewish state into signing the accords. This made the neocons natural supporters of the Likud party of Benjamin Netanyahu. Netanyahu came to power in 1996, after the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin by a Jewish extremist and during a wave of suicide bombings claimed by Hamas. In a paper that appeared the same year under the title

"A clean break", the most influential neocons advocated a general redrawing of the Middle Eastern map. It would mean toppling the oligarchies and dictatorships of the region, which, along with their failing economic policies, only survived thanks to their embracing of populist anti-Israeli rhetoric. This was the "preventive" strategy at the core of the American foreign policy agenda for the region.

Its principal advocate was Paul Wolfowitz, who would later become assistant secretary of defense for George W. Bush. In 1998, the neocon think-tanker backed up this strategy with an open letter addressed to President Clinton titled, "Project for a New American Century." Among the signatories were a majority of the individuals who would fill prominent posts two years later in the Bush White House. The text called for eliminating Saddam Hussein, on the grounds that he had failed to respect the embargo imposed on him in 1991 in the wake of Operation Desert Storm, and that he had accumulated "weapons of mass destruction." They had convinced themselves, in unison with a number of Iraqi Shiite exiles living in the United States and hangers-on in their circles, that eliminating the dictator would let a civil society emerge in Mesopotamia. On that foundation, they would build a democratic Middle East that was pro-American and at peace with Israel. The events of 9/11 would birth this conceptual framework by a forceps delivery—by means of a concrete military offensive.

Once past the shock and the grief, Americans responded to the jihadist attack on New York and Washington in two stages. The first aimed at treating the symptom of the evil by destroying the organization directly responsible for it. This stage kicked off on October 7, 2001, with the United States invading territory controlled by the Taliban in Afghanistan where bin Laden was taking refuge. It destroyed the regime of Mullah Omar but left the al-Qaeda chieftain unscathed. The objective of the second stage was to eradicate this same evil by changing the context that, in the neocon view, had caused it to emerge in the Middle East. This translated at first into the invasion of Iraq by the United States and its allies on March 20, 2003. The motives driving it were the elimination of Saddam Hussein and the democratization of Iraq. Ironically, after a Sunni insurrection spearheaded by al-Qaeda had ended, majority-Shiite Iraq passed into the orbit of its Iranian neighbor. The Sunni reaction ultimately would morph into "The Islamic State in Iraq and *Sham* (the Levant)," the entity also known by the acronym ISIS (ISIL), DAESH—from the Arabic acronym—or the Islamic State.

It would constitute itself along the lines of the new international jihadism and, from 2014 to 2017, would turn Mosul and Raqqa into the capitals of a novel, shocking reign of in-your-face terror.

The offensive against Afghanistan showcased the mismatch between the kind of challenge thrown down by the 9/11 "blessed double raid" and the retaliatory capabilities of the United States and its allies. Indeed, their military arrays were superbly equipped for eliminating a regime entrenched on a territory with barracks, palaces, and infrastructures. But, in this case, their firepower came up short in attempts to destroy what was in reality a diffuse terrorist network. As its Arabic name signifying "the base" suggests, al-Qaeda was more of a computer database that knit the members of an organization together in digital space than a centralized base vulnerable to bombardments and attacks by Special Forces.

Initially at least, the invasion of Afghanistan also did not live up to the expectations of bin Laden and al-Zawahiri. They had been sure that the American response would result in the expeditionary force getting bogged down quickly only to end up being routed, like the USSR. Moreover, they thought that al-Qaeda would profit by taking the lead in a jihad that would mobilize the world's Muslim masses against the invasion of this "land of Islam" by unbeliever armies. However, the troops that took Kabul were proper Muslims recruited from among the "Northern Alliance," a pro-Western coalition of tribes and ethnic groups hostile to the Taliban. The images of the Arab jihadists they captured and bound with barbed wire aroused little compassion in the Islamic world, which, at all events, was hardly eager to start a new jihad at this point.

If al-Qaeda was deceived in this hope, its network proved highly resilient in the face of the military offensive. On October 7 when the invasion began, Al Jazeera broadcast a video that made a huge impact. There, in a mountain cave in Afghanistan, sat bin Laden with al-Zawahiri and two jihadist leaders. First, the al-Qaeda chief extolled "the blessed vanguard of the Muslims" that had bruised the arrogance of the United States. He then swore "by Allah, who raised the heavens without columns, that neither America nor the people that live there can dream of security before we can experience it in Palestine, and before all infidel armies leave the land of Muhammad [Saudi Arabia]—peace be unto Him." The medium was the message: four men sitting on the ground, turbaned and dressed in traditional Muslim garb, Kalashnikovs posed at their sides, threatening the global superpower from

a mountain cave. At the same time, cruise missiles and fighter jets were smashing Taliban strongholds under a rain of bombs.

The video had a great effect. For one, it evoked a parallel to the exiled Prophet with a handful of companions preparing the conquest of Medina and establishing Islam throughout the world. But it registered in a larger context than just that of Islam—it was also about David battling Goliath, the struggle of the weak and destitute against the powerful. Bin Laden's remarks put the number of deaths on 9/11, and from various attacks inflicted on the United States by jihadists, into perspective. He pointed to the immense crimes blamed on the West, from Hiroshima to Palestine. This positioned the terrorist attacks in a logic of legitimate reprisal—an eye for an eye. This communications mode would create a veritable standard for al-Qaeda's video messages in the coming years. They became its principal media signature and showy proof of its survival in an inerasable cyberspace. The style would be copied by later-stage jihadists; for example, a video posted online in January 2015 by one Amedy Culibaly, Kalashnikov by his side, invoking a similar context of meaning, claimed responsibility for the Charlie Hebdo and Hypercacher supermarket massacres in Paris.

While the most powerful army in the world and its allies steamrollered over Afghanistan, a steady stream of video clips of this type continued to be broadcast during the fall of 2001 and the years 2002–2003. Over time, they concocted a heroic, indomitable image for bin Laden and his minions. However, with the passage of time, the reality, skewed by both sides by emotion and propaganda, became more nuanced. On the one hand, al-Qaeda's infrastructures on the ground were severely degraded, and the organization lost a number of mid- and high-ranking cadres. Among them were the 9/11 organizers who ended up imprisoned in Guantanamo. This American offshore prison would become a ready-made foil for building a Great Narrative of victimized jihadists that dogged the invasion of Iraq, as we will analyze further on.

These setbacks, however, did not keep al-Qaeda from pursuing its strategy of attacking from all directions. And yet, it did not manage to mobilize the Muslim masses under its banner, as we will also see. In hindsight, there is every indication that eliminating bin Laden was not a priority objective for the White House strategists. Relative to the push for regime change in Baghdad, capturing him had been put on the back burner. The al-Qaeda chieftain was simply secondary to the neocons' grand project

of remodeling the Middle East by installing a new regime in Baghdad that was compatible with the United States and able to coexist peacefully with Israel. From this perspective, the evident resilience of jihadist terrorism during the year 2002 conveniently allowed a deliberate blurring of the roles played by Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein. Substituting one for the other helped hatch the improbable "War on Terror" as the way to a tangible victory.

In early December 2001, the Israeli government led by Ariel Sharon started to raise the wall dividing the Jewish state from the Palestinian territories, which would throw a decisive roadblock in the way of the Second Intifada. A contemporaneous attack on Israeli tourists in Kenya by al-Qaeda mostly failed. To downplay the fallout from this failure, a long communiqué from a "political office of the *Qaidat al-Jihad*" inventoried all the attacks claimed by the organization dating back to the August 7, 1998 twin explosions at the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Such a listing seemed unlikely to compensate for the unmobilized "Muslim masses" around the world that were supposed to have jumped at making common cause with the hunted jihadists.

The second stage of the American response to 9/11 opened on March 20, 2003 with the invasion of Iraq. It was supposed to be decisive. On the operational side, it allowed the full exercise of the American superpower to achieve its objective—the destruction of Saddam's regime. It was a mission better adapted to the military capabilities of the United States than tracking down the elusive bin Laden. It was, moreover, just the thing to fire up the world's television viewers. In Washington's enemies it inspired a feeling of "shock and awe," and it reassured its allies by producing an image-laden(!), Hollywoodesque narrative. In the eyes of television viewers everywhere, it even managed to counterbalance the shock images of the kamikaze aircraft slamming into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center.

The way had been prepared for the offensive by an important communications campaign headlined by President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair. Between them they made a case for the peril posed by weapons of mass destruction (WMD) supposedly stockpiled by Saddam Hussein, as well as for his organic links with al-Qaeda. Its climax was a show-and-tell by United States Secretary of State Colin Powell at the UN on February 5, 2003, during which he brandished an aluminum tube to underline the lethality of Saddam's WMDs. However, his stunt failed to sway the skepticism

of Security Council members France and Russia, whose subsequent vetoes deprived the offensive of the UN's stamp of approval. It had to make do with a "coalition of the willing" composed of allies and clients of the United States. Proof came within weeks after the start of the offensive that the WMD business had been overhyped, knowingly "sexed up" to get Congress to appropriate funds for the military. With this funding, an offensive could be launched whose immense human, material, and financial costs a mere "regime change" could never have legitimized.

Baghdad fell on April 9, symbolized by the toppling of Saddam Hussein's immense statue on Paradise Square (pulled down like the Lenin and Stalin statues in the former Soviet Union). George W. Bush celebrated aboard an aircraft carrier under a "Mission Accomplished" banner. In reality, the very serious difficulties that the occupation of Iraq would create for the United States and its allies had only just begun. Fulfilling the neocon ideological premise that Saddam's elimination would spark a virtuous cycle of Middle East democratization would have to wait. Expectations of seeing liberal transatlantic norms take hold that would end the *Clash of Civilizations* and prove that the *End of History* had arrived were confronted by structural realities highly resistant to realizing this simplistic utopia.

In fact, by striking down Saddam, the United States hoped to achieve other ends. First on the list was weakening the Sunni axis, because it blamed 9/11 on the complacent Saudi regime's incompetence in handling al-Qaeda. Second, the Americans wanted a takeover by the Iraqi Shiite majority, expecting that their empowerment would spawn imitators among their Iranian fellow believers. Pentagon strategists convinced themselves that Iranian society, in which were manifest cultural dissident behaviors critical of the established order, would rise up against the mullahs. In the process, they would make common cause with the many Iranians living in California and elsewhere in the West since the shah had fallen.

This strategy was wrong on two principal counts. First, it marginalized Iraq's Sunni Arabs. In effect, the occupiers punished them collectively for the support many but not all had given to Saddam. This pushed some Sunni into insurrection—all the more worrisome because of the key positions they previously held in the military and intelligence apparatus. With no other prospects for survival, these Baathist nationalists brought their talents to the local jihadists. Once opponents, now they were all in the same boat as a Sunni Arab minority facing the Shiite majority and the

Kurds, both aided by the invader. This natural alliance was reinforced by links between the Sunni Arabs and al-Qaeda, to which the Jordanian Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a veteran Afghanistan jihadist, had sworn allegiance. He unified this network by creating the local branch of that organization, which he named "al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia." Its name in Arabic, *al-Qaʿida fi bilad al-rafidayn* (literally: al-Qaeda "in the land of two rivers"), was taken from the traditional Islamic place name system. It let him avoid using the modern term Iraq, now associated with a national entity whose very existence had been dissolved. After various metamorphoses, the world would see this offshoot of al-Qaeda's ultimate incarnation during the ensuing decade, when Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi proclaimed the "Islamic State" at the start of Ramadan on June 29, 2014 with himself as caliph. We shall return to this in greater detail below.

The neocon dream of democratizing the region by transforming occupied Iraq ran headlong into a hard reality that bore little resemblance to the mechanistic geopolitical schemes contrived inside the Beltway. The fall of the totalitarian regime in Baghdad was regarded in Washington as a variation on the fall of the Soviet system in Prague and Warsaw in 1989. The American occupation would last eight years until President Obama, fulfilling a campaign pledge, ended it in October 2011. It cost the lives of 4,488 American military personnel and at least 190,000 others, mostly civilians, who perished during combat operations and in terrorist attacks. Much energy and resources went into political engineering designed to build democratic institutions representative of the country's diverse ethnoreligious components. However, the situation on the ground was marred by the recurring violence of the Sunni insurrection. It was visited on Baghdad as much as on the majority Sunni zones. The United States scored a few successes, such as killing al-Zarqawi on June 7, 2006, or enlisting specific Sunni tribes in the fight against the jihadists (the so-called "Sunni Awakening" devised by two American generals, David Petraeus and John Allen). But, in the end, the American policy was branded by two moral wrongs that alienated many otherwise sympathetic Sunni: the human rights abuses at the detention camps at Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib.

Guantanamo opened in January 2002 on an American offshore base not subject to United States laws. This meant that these "enemy combatants" suspected of ties to al-Qaeda captured in Afghanistan and elsewhere could be held there without trial. The indignities visited on the prisoners helped

create an image of victimization, which Sunni jihadists turned back against the United States's Great Narrative of the War on Terror. The cases against many of the prisoners were weak, which led to some being released—newly radicalized by the treatment they had undergone inside the camp. Thus, the orange overalls that the detainees wore became a symbol of arbitrary imprisonment and injustice, and the jihadists would make their hostages put them on before being beheaded. Clips of these atrocities were broadcast on video-sharing sites, starting with al-Zarqawi's execution of the American entrepreneur Nicholas Berg in May 2004. It would be followed by a morbid series that climaxed with videos of mass killings posted on social networks. The message addressed to enemies of the United States and the West justified these executions as an eye for an eye, in an effort to fend off the accusation of terrorism with moral relativism. This practice only came to an end when the "ISIS caliphate" fell in the autumn of 2017, as we shall see below.

In the second camp, Abu Ghraib, one of Saddam's old prisons located west of Baghdad and infamous for the atrocities committed there in his name, American soldiers physically and sexually abused Sunni prisoners. Uncovered by the press in April 2004, these practices caused a huge scandal in the United States, undermining the moral justification for their having invaded Iraq to restore law and rights after the criminal Baathist regime. Abu Ghraib and other detention facilities, like Camp Buqa, became superb incubators for the Iraqi jihadist movement, reinforcing the networks from which the Islamic State would emerge.

The consequences of the Sunni insurrection confronting the American forces would reverberate until the end of the next decade. Furthermore, the Shiite trap the American strategists of the Iraq invasion thought they had set to overthrow the Islamic Republic of Iran went off the rails. Here, they made their second major strategic error. In effect, the jihadist terror conducted by al-Zarqawi had a stridently anti-Shiite dimension, at least as much as an anti-Western one. He vowed to bring death to the "heretics" (*rafida*) even more surely than to the "unbelievers" (*kuffar*).

As early as August 2003, one of the top Iraqi ayatollahs, Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim, died in a Sunni jihadist suicide attack in Najaf, one of the major sacred Shiite towns. Killed on al-Zarqawi's order, he had been one of the principal Shiite opponents of Saddam Hussein. He had fled to Iran in 1980, where he founded the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq,

as well as the Badr brigades that fought Saddam on Iran's side. Even though al-Hakim aligned with the Islamic Republic, and was of an anti-American mindset, he returned to his country on May 12, 2003, the day after the Saddam regime fell. He showed himself open to a certain amount of compromise with the occupier, his brother Abdul Aziz al-Hakim being part of the interim government.

Al-Hakim's immense popularity with the Shiite masses made him a natural target, but he was still the second Shiite religious personage open to dialogue with the Americans who was assassinated. The first, the Ayatollah Abdul Majid al-Khoei, was also slain in the Najaf sanctuary, after the fall of Baghdad on April 10, by the henchmen of a young, radical, and stridently anti-American Shiite cleric, Muqtada al-Sadr. Al-Sadr was descended from a line of prestigious ayatollahs, including Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr, who, at the end of his life, had been Ayatollah Khomeini's personal representative in Iraq.

Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr and his sister had been massacred ignominiously at the end of a macabre scene staged by Saddam's agents on April 9, 1980. This happened twenty-three years to the day before the Americans rolled into Baghdad, and the cleric's disciples saw in this fateful date Allah's intervening to avenge His martyr (unbeknownst to the American generals who were unaware of this divine manifestation). And, for an even more immediate genealogy, Muqtada is also the son of Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr, killed by the regime in 1999. The father was an extremely charismatic figure in the popular resistance to the fallen despot. For the al-Sadrs, as for Khomeini, the Shiite clergy had to fight the fight daily (*hawza natiqa*) with an activist attitude. That meant not confining themselves to theological issues (*hawza samita*), as a quietist tradition would have preferred, in counterpoint to which the Islamic Republic was formed.

Despite his youth, Muqtada threw himself into politics, with Iranian backing, to exploit the social capital of his prestigious lineage. He called on his fellow Shiites to walk to Karbala, Shiism's Golgotha. Located a three-day walk from Baghdad, Karbala is where Prophet Mohammed's grandson, the Imam Husayn ibn Ali, was assassinated on October 10, 680, by soldiers of the Sunni caliph of Damascus, thereby founding the martyrdom characteristic of the Shiite creed. Four million faithful participated in this commemoration (almost double the number at Mecca, which received slightly more than two million pilgrims that year). This helped

create, soon after the invasion, a balance of power tilted toward radical Shiism favoring Iran.

Muqtada was also dead set against the neocon pipe dream of a harmonious relationship between the United States and the Islamic world. In 2004, his followers banded together in an "Army of the Mahdi" and opened a second front against the Americans, allying with Sunni insurgents in the town of Fallujah. It was not until 2005, and especially after February 22, 2006, that they threw themselves overtly into the battle against the Sunni in the quest for political hegemony. On that day, al-Zarqawi had the dome of the Golden Mosque in the town of Samarra, which sheltered the tomb of one of Shiism's imams, dynamited. The same fate met the entry to the cave where the Mahdi or Messiah had vanished, who, tradition held, would come back in the end times to bring light and justice to the world. This sacrilege against one of the most revered sanctuaries of Shiite worship roused a massive number of followers into a mobilization that spawned interdenominational violence. Shiite demographic supremacy over the Sunni allowed them to break al-Qaeda's insurrection, which the American army had proved unable to do on its own.

This turning of the tide, which would ultimately win the ongoing Iraqi civil war for the Shiites, also coincided with the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as president of their backer Iran in August 2005. His predecessor Mohammad Khatami had pursued multiple openings to the West in the name of a "dialogue of civilizations." The goal was to present the image of an affable Iran at a time when 9/11 had pushed the needle of the global terrorism meter over to the Sunni side. Teheran even supported the offensive against the Taliban—despite President Bush lumping Iran in with the "axis of evil" during his State of the Union address in January 2002.

In electing as president an extremist whose first statements called for "wiping Israel from the map," the Iranian establishment had created a great stir. It now monetized its position of strength by supporting, through the interposed Iraqi Shiites, the quashing of the Sunni insurrection in Iraq. This happened at a time when the political cost of doing so was becoming increasingly intolerable to the United States electorate. The massive deployment of Shiite militias against the jihadists came after the latter had already considerably "bloodied" the contingents of Americans and their allies, and when Washington found itself in a weakened position. This also favorably positioned the Islamic Republic of Iran to engage in nuclear

blackmail by enriching uranium. An agreement with the United States and Europe freezing the program would only be negotiated in 2013, after the election of Ahmadinejad's successor, Hassan Rouhani.

The American project for remodeling the Middle East, touted as the best way to deal with the causes of jihadist terrorism after 9/11, did not bear the fruit expected by its neocon designers. It ought to have promoted the emergence of an Iraqi civil society tied to the United States, at peace with Israel. It was intended to have furnished a virtuous model of a liberal democracy straight out of *The End of History* that would radiate throughout the region. Then, so went the scenario, the mullahs' regime in Iran would fall and the oil markets, thanks to hydrocarbon exports from Iraq's Bassorah, Kirkuk, or Mosul, would be under control, to the detriment of a Saudi Arabia suspected to have been complicit with the 9/11 kamikaze. The whole package failed. Ironically, it was the support by their Iranian enemy, rendered via the local Shiite militias, that finally helped the Americans snuff out the Sunni insurrection piloted by al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia. Only then could the United States troops leave the country in 2011 and still save face.

Yet, ironically, suppressing the Iraqi Sunni uprising promoted the mutation of jihadism into an even higher threat. It signaled the end both of the pyramidal, global organization developed by bin Laden, and of al-Zawahiri's strategic concept of fighting the "distant enemy." They were replaced by a matrix-like, horizontal system encompassing all the ethnic, confessional, or social tensions of the regions it took hold in. It spread everywhere, especially to Europe—with a focus on France—and to the Levant. Focusing on Syria and Iraq, in 2014 it ended up declaring where the two countries touched as the "caliphate" of the Islamic State. From there, it would metastasize into the biggest challenge of the coming decade.

FOUR

The Third Jihadist Generation

Networks and Territories (2005–2019)

THE FAILURE OF al-Qaeda's top-down strategy in Afghanistan and Iraq sounded the death knell of the "vertical" model with its focus on fighting the distant enemy. Al-Zarqawi and his accomplices likely had pledged allegiance to bin Laden because of the power of his brand at the time, which assured immediate notoriety for anyone who claimed it and instant publicity for any attack carried out in his name. The Iraqi activists, however, wasted no time in making the "heretical" Shiites their priority targets. The sect seemed much more dangerous in the long run to their project of a Sunni caliphate than the Western occupying armies that eventually would pull out. Al-Zarqawi's dissent led to an exchange of bitter communications with al-Zawahiri, who stuck to the al-Qaeda orthodoxy he had expressed in *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*. Al-Zarqawi argued back that "we have to reserve nine bullets for the apostates [Shiites] for every one for the infidels [Westerners]." We know this, because their correspondence was intercepted and made public.

In 2004 and 2005, as this mutation of jihadism played out on its principal front in Iraq, the West started to see a change in the attacks carried out on its soil. In 2002–2003, al-Qaeda had still dispatched activists to hit targets from Bali to Mombasa. In Casablanca, all the victims of the attacks of May 16, 2003 were Moroccans and Muslims. Then the year 2004 started with what could be considered a "remake" of 9/11 on European soil. On March 11, in Madrid, four commuter trains rolling toward Atocha station blew up almost

simultaneously. Had they not been running behind schedule and arrived on time in the station, the hall would have been leveled and thousands would have been killed. (As it were, 191 people died.)

The symmetry with the destruction of the World Trade Center towers was deliberate, including the choice of the date—911 days (off by one) after "9/11"—and the four trains mimicking the four hijacked airliners. The entire Iberian peninsula now found itself challenged in a communiqué justifying the attack as "the settling of ancient accounts with Islam." This allusion to the *Reconquista* of Muslim Andalusia by the fifteenth-century Catholic kings meant that Spanish territory was considered a "land of Islam usurped by the infidels." In Islamist doctrine, this justified "a jihad of defense" obligating every Muslim to help retake the lost lands, thus rendering "*halal*" the blood of all infidels killed in this "blessed raid." More prosaically, with the Spanish legislative election in full swing, the communiqué sought to pressure the new government into pulling its troops out of Iraq—which the Socialist majority that emerged from the vote count quickly complied with.

The Madrid attack was part and parcel of the jihad strategy against "the distant enemy," and it chalked up a victory after the Spanish withdrawal from Iraq. However, the murder of the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam the following November would already follow a different logic: a young Islamist originally from Morocco shot and stabbed van Gogh for having "blasphemed" with his short film *Submission*. The clip denounced the condition of women under Islam by projecting incriminating Koranic verses on a naked female body.

Van Gogh's killer had not been trained directly by al-Qaeda; socialized in Dutch jihadist circles, he committed the act following an obscure process of doctrinal brainwashing. It was not a vertical, top-down logic, but one that started by being part of a network and implanted in a territory—a very different configuration from the attacks on 9/11 and March 11 in Madrid. The pattern was simple: identify a local "enemy of Allah," in this instance the famed painter's great-grandnephew, and then kill him. The ultimate objective was to spread fear among the victim's peers while firing up the Muslim masses supposedly "avenged" by this gesture. This "punishing blasphemers" approach was taken later in the campaign launched against the Prophet cartoons (published in September 2005 by a Danish daily in response to the van Gogh affair). It also applied to the massacre committed

by the Kuachi brothers in the editorial offices of *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris on January 7, 2015. The original inspiration for avenging sacrilege in this way may be traceable to Khomeini's infamous February 14, 1989 fatwa against Salman Rushdie, but here it was executed in typical Sunni jihadist fashion.

The attacks in London of July 7, 2005 reflected the quest for refining the model theorized in the *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner* manifesto, but still always under the explicit control of al-Qaeda, with al-Zawahiri running the show. That particular day had been chosen symbolically in the same way as with previous operations. What mattered was the date, when "the leader of the crusader empire [Prime Minister Tony Blair]" presided over the G8 summit. It was also the first day of the British assuming the presidency of the European Union, and on which the choice of London as the site of the next Olympics was announced. In addition, it met operational mode requirements involving the use of the underground and a bus, in lieu of the planes used in the United States and the trains in Madrid.

"Allah the Most High," explained al-Zawahiri in the video claiming responsibility for the attacks, "Sent the knights of the Islamic anger to strike at the heart of London in a blessed raid." He was referring to the attackers, three young men of Pakistani origin and a Jamaican convert, at least one of whom had been trained in an al-Qaeda camp in Pakistan. Their London "martyr operation" resulted in fifty-six dead and 700 wounded. Although al-Qaeda had claimed responsibility, the terrorists, unlike the 9/11 perpetrators, were no strangers to the United Kingdom. They were native-born, educated there—to the point of speaking English with a strong Midlands working-class accent—and therefore had acted in their home environment. Despite al-Zawahiri's unchanged rhetoric, the jihadist model had mutated: it now relied on human resources embedded in the Western target that al-Qaeda had in its crosshairs. This metamorphosis to a new mode of terrorism outstripped the first two phases, as well as the distinction between "near enemy" and "distant enemy." It would also put its stamp on the next decade.

* * *

The two "fathers" of this third-generation jihadism had the same *kunya* (Islamic surname) of Abu Musab, after a companion of the Prophet named Musab ibn Omayr, martyred in the Battle of Uhud in 625. The first of the pair,

Mustapha Sitt Mariam Nassar, called Abu Musab al-Suri ("the Syrian"), a blue-eyed redhead, was born in 1957 to a good family in Aleppo. He started his political engagement in the Muslim Brotherhood ranks, then joined the jihad in Afghanistan before spending the 1990s in Europe. He studied engineering in France, married a Spanish woman, and acquired her nationality. While living in "Londonistan," he became known especially for supporting the GIA by editing its international bulletin *Al-Ansar*. He joined bin Laden in Afghanistan after the autumn of 1996 to serve as his liaison officer with Arab and European media.

After the American and allied offensive against al-Qaeda in Afghanistan in retaliation for 9/11, al-Suri fled and wandered through the region until his capture in early 2005 by Baluchis. They sold him to the United States, because he was on a list of wanted people with a price on his head. After American intelligence was through with him, they turned him over to the Bashar al-Assad regime, then still coddled by the West, in the rendition policy framework. His trail went cold after the outbreak of the Syrian insurrection in 2011, as we shall see below. His major contribution to the history of jihadism is a work of some 2,000 pages, *A Call for a Global Islamic Resistance*, that he penned during his wanderings and published online in Arabic shortly before his 2005 capture. The poorly written, longish and repetitive book suffers from the adverse conditions under which it was written. In its most original passages, a critical retrospective of al-Qaeda's strategy, he calls the organization a wholesale failure.

Al-Suri argued that 9/11 testified to bin Laden's hubris and immoderation. By overestimating his powers and carrying out his badly calibrated provocation against the United States, he drew a reaction that destroyed the organization. The fault lay in a misbegotten strategy prioritizing the fight against the "distant enemy." Even if the Muslim masses were enthusiastic about the destruction of the World Trade Center, it was not enough to make them rush to al-Qaeda's banner, because it was not something they could identify with in their daily lives. It was necessary to abandon the "top-down" strategy of bin Laden and al-Zawahiri, embodied in a Leninist, pyramidal organization that issued orders to be executed. The preferable alternative was a "bottom up" strategy based on mutual knowledge and imitation. It would be both molecular and virtual, and would let potential jihadists easily self-identify relative to issues they had experienced in their daily lives.

This reversal al-Suri summed up in A *Call for a Global Islamic Resistance* with a single slogan: "A system, not an organization (*nizam, la tanzim*)." This is the matrix model, which recalls the theory of the "revolutionary rhizome" popularized by the philosopher Gilles Deleuze during the 1980s when al-Suri was studying in France. In effect, it was a call to overtake, in the sense of the third movement in the Hegelian dialectic (*Aufhebung*), the two prior jihadism phases whose dynamics it synthesized and fused in a new context. For the too-distant target of America, al-Suri in effect substituted a Europe easily accessible from the Middle East and North Africa by plane or ferry. Living in Europe were millions of young people of Muslim immigrant lineage as well as converts. A percentage were unhappy with the cards society had dealt them. They were poorly integrated culturally and socially, living in districts that had been left behind and were dominated by the drug economy and delinquency. Al-Suri hoped to put these same youths in direct contact with their peers in the southern and eastern Mediterranean, train them as fighters, and indoctrinate them. That was where the territories of jihad were being born in the aftermath of Iraq, or where Europeans had been drawn to the Sunni insurrection since 2003. Alternatively, they might train and fight in the Iran-Pakistan tribal zones—more remote, but the Taliban jihad was still live there.

* * *

During the same period, the Iraqi insurrection changed its nature under the leadership of the second Abu Musab—al-Zarqawi, that is—and that of his local successors after he was killed in June 2006. Born in October 1966 in the Jordanian town of Zarqa, a stronghold of jihadist Salafism after having been one of the PLO's citadels, al-Zarqawi left school without getting his diploma. Influenced by a local imam, he traveled to Peshawar in 1989 to join the Afghanistan jihad. There, he spent time with one of the principal jihadist ideologues, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, and enlisted as a fighter with the most radical Afghan factions.

Al-Zarqawi returned to Jordan in 1993, and the following year he was sentenced to a five-year prison term. Pardoned when King Abdullah II ascended to the throne in 1999, al-Zarqawi returned to Afghanistan to take charge of a camp for training Arab and Kurdish terrorists. He achieved international notoriety when Colin Powell denounced him from

the UN podium in February 2003 in the same breath as his organization in Kurdistan, *Ansar al-Islam*. But he had also carried out attacks and assassinations in Jordan. After the American invasion of Iraq the following month, al-Zarqawi played a lead role in organizing the Sunni jihadist resistance. He became notorious, most notably for the decapitation on May 7, 2004 of the American hostage Nicholas Berg. Even if his exact role in the beheading was unclear, the broadcast of its video furnished the template for numerous staged hostage executions. The Islamic State turned beheading videos into the weapon of choice for its media propaganda offensive during the next decade, as we shall see in what follows.

Further, in giving priority to the extermination of Shiites over fighting the American army, al-Zarqawi diverged from the strategy of fighting the "distant enemy" extolled by al-Zawahiri. As such, the local branch, "al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia," deviated from the jihadist ideology of the second generation. The linking of the two territories of jihad, Europe and Iraq—which would be enlarged to the entire Levant after the insurrection against Bashar al-Assad started in 2011, coincided with the maturing of the third phase of jihad. It would be expressed as much by the posting online of al-Suri's *Call* as by the new forms of Iraqi Sunni guerrilla warfare under al-Zarqawi's leadership. These territories were interlinked, not only by the comings and goings of the jihadists, but by proliferating social networks online. On February 14, 2005, YouTube in California obtained its operating license. In short order, it revolutionized the broadcasting of images, putting them within everyone's reach without the need of television, a stark difference from the 9/11 era. This allowed an in-depth renewal of the forms of jihadist mobilization, thanks to the virtual juncture between localized terrorism and global jihad.

However, this third phase, whose principles had been set in the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century, would take a few years to incubate before it could be deployed full force. In Europe, it found an especially fertile ground in the prisons. Here, the young jihadists, imprisoned either returning from Iraq or trying to get there, busied themselves with massive conversions of common criminals from the disenfranchised banlieues. Simultaneously, Salafism was expanding in these same districts just as the first generation born of immigrants and educated in Europe reached adulthood only to be profoundly alienated by the social situation—in some cases alienated enough to incite jihadism.

In the Arab world, the uprisings of the years 2010–2013, after giving rise to immense hopes of democratization, ended either in restored authoritarianism, as in Egypt, or in civil war, as in Libya, Yemen, and Syria. Meanwhile, the Sunni-Shiite conflict that obsessed al-Zarqawi became the Middle East's principal fault line. It is in this new context that the jihadism of the third generation would continue to develop until it converged in its most monstrous outcome: the Islamic State "caliphate." It was proclaimed with its attendant horrors and massacres in Mosul in June 2014, while series of attacks perpetrated at the same time in Europe would drench the continent in blood. It is this new environment born out of the failed hopes of the "Arab Spring" that we shall now turn to.

PART II

From Arab Spring to Jihadist Caliphate

FIVE

The Arab Spring in Context

ON DECEMBER 17, 2010 in the Tunisian backcountry prefecture of Sidi Bouzid, a 26-year-old street vendor named Tarek (going by Mohamed) Bouazizi set himself on fire following a run-in with a town policewoman. This human drama—one of several similar instances in North Africa at the time—sparked the firestorm that in a burst of enthusiasm then would be called "the Arab Spring". In the new year 2011, regimes from Tunisia to Bahrain, with Libya, Egypt, Yemen, and Syria in between, fell or came in for violent shocks, ending in some cases in civil war. The frenzy, whether directly or indirectly, touched off uprisings of varying sizes in every other Arab state. Several of these regimes would engage the revolutionary forces politically, financially, or militarily to either support or repress them.

Most of the world's media and NGOs indulged in the hope that democratization would ensue, and the region would escape from the false choice between dictatorship or jihadism. They enthused about a "Revolution 2.0" in which social networks played an active role. However, the movement quickly took a different turn, as from behind the smartphone screens deep cracks in society came out into the open. In the months following the outbreak of insurrection and the fall of despots, the young, educated, urban middle classes were outflanked. Internal as well as regional forces much older than those liberated by toppling the established order took over. In most cases, the Islamist parties linked to the Muslim Brotherhood hijacked the revolt they had no part in bringing about. They did so at the ballot box

where possible, through street demonstrations after Friday prayers, and in skirmishes with the police or the army.

The Al Jazeera satellite network, financed and controlled by the gas emirate of Qatar, broadcast this evolution live, offering Arab living rooms a front-row seat at the key symbolic moments of these "revolutions." Most notably, this included the eighteen-day occupation of Cairo's Tahrir square, which ended in Mubarak's resignation on February 11, 2011. But it also made the Brothers into media personalities and movement leaders, rather than the secularized young people. This "Brotherizing of the revolution" is assumed to have channeled the upheavals that lay ahead by entrusting the region's fate to its pious middle classes. The Turkish-Qatari axis basked in Washington's approval under the Obama presidency, with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP), a Turkish blend of Islamic ethic with the spirit of capitalism, providing the point of reference.

Faced with this "Brotherist" axis coopting the revolutionary dynamic for its own ends, other forces in the Sunni sphere responded with a counteroffensive. The oil monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula under Saudi and Emirati leadership constituted the point of its spear and its grand paymaster. This counterrevolution relied on military hierarchies—especially in Egypt, where it led to Marshal Abdel Fattah el-Sisi taking power in the summer of 2013—and equally on a vast Salafist sphere of influence enveloping the shantytowns.

The counteroffensive benefited from Riyadh's patronage, redistributed the windfall of its petrodollars, and contended with the Muslim Brotherhood for control of the Islamist landscape. Yet, its collective allegiance to the Saudi regime rested on shifting sands, and its penetrability to jihadist themes posed a problem. The relationship would become more complex the more powerful Prince Mohammad ben Salman al-Saud grew, starting in 2015. In Saudi Arabia, this led to the Wahhabite religious establishment being shunted aside—a considerable if unforeseen secondary effect of the "Spring" of 2011. Sunni unity would not survive this fracturing linked either to support, or hostility, to the Muslim Brotherhood. In addition, this post-revolutionary internal splintering fostered a kind of one-upmanship. It led to the reemergence of a terrorism that the dynamics of democratic uprisings had temporarily stifled. From 2012 on, "third-generation jihadism" resulted in multiple attacks on Islamic lands in the Mediterranean region, the Middle East, the Sahel—and in Europe.

They were carried out along lines defined by its strategists, the two "Abu Musabs," al-Suri and al-Zarqawi.

This turn of events sharpened the antagonisms between Sunnis and Shiites in the Near and Middle East. In effect, the uprisings in Bahrain, Syria, and Yemen were taken hostage by the struggle between Iran and the Arab oil monarchies for dominance over hydrocarbons and the future of the Levant. The Arabian Peninsula leaders immediately saw Bahrain's revolt in terms of a clash between the Shiite majority population and the Sunni dynasty. Military intervention by the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf—united until the 2017 rupture that pitted Qatar against the other members—crushed it on March 14, 2011.

In Syria, by contrast, President Bashar al-Assad's power, based on the Alawite minority, was at first bolstered by Teheran and its allies. The Assad regime's resistance to the uprising that began in late March 2011 also benefited decisively from Moscow's aid. It confronted an insurrection in which the Sunni and then the Islamist and jihadist elements would eclipse the original general protest. The Iranian-Russian strategy of projecting military force on the ground in the winter of 2017–2018 would gain the upper hand over the rebellion. Initial encouragement from the West faded away while the image of the uprising was appropriated by the Islamic State—though support from the oil monarchies pitted Qatar against its rivals. Similarly, in Yemen, tribal and traditional regional elements intersected in democratic stirrings that evolved into a confessional split with by al-Qaeda on one side and the Houthis on the other.

The deepening of this fault line between the two main branches of Islam fostered a process of "Salafization" in the Sunni camp. The partisans of this doctrine also theorized a rupture with the Shiite "heretics" (*rafidha*), advocating their eventual extermination by jihad. It was on Iraqi soil that this animus first played out. The American occupation of Iraq from 2003 to 2011 had ended with the paradox of Shiite parties—clients of Teheran, Washington's sworn enemy—taking power. This doctrinal hostility now morphed into massacres of Shiites on the instigation of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. It then spread to Syrian territory, labeled the Alawites as "heretics" also, and cursed them as such. The attempt to knit jihad and rebellion against the Assad regime together under the banner of Sunni identity was finalized on June 29, 2014, when Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's spokesman proclaimed the Islamic State's "caliphate."

With these front lines drawn, international jihadism concocted a new fantasy. It rallied militants from areas ranging from North Africa to the European "banlieues of Islam" to the defense of Muslims oppressed by a novel enemy. No longer would they fight the usual specters—the colonialist, then imperialist, Christian West "crusader" or the Jewish and Zionist state of Israel. Instead, they were called to do battle against a heresy within Islam itself that few had heard of. Even fewer, from Cairo to Marrakesh and from Marseille to Molenbeek, would have encountered it. This sudden introduction of Shiism as public enemy number one helped consolidate Salafist doctrine. It also strengthened the Salafists' claim that their ideology incarnated the pure faith best: it alone was truly obsessed with pronouncing anathema on the followers of Imam Ali. The doctrine's literal, decontextualized reading of the Scriptures, also excommunicated into the bargain all Sunni "bad Muslims" like the Sufi mystics. Their tombs and mausoleums could be systematically dynamited before massacring their faithful.

The spread of this dogma and weaponizing it as jihad manifested itself in having the letter of Koranic laws applied to non-Muslims as well. They would either be condemned to death as "infidels" or reduced to slavery. Such was the fate of Iraq's Yazidi community. In territories taken over by ISIS starting in the year 2014, Yazidi women were turned into sex slaves and the men killed. This was also the fate reserved for Europe, tarnished in the contemporary Salafist vocabulary as the land of unbelievers (*kuffar*). It led to hundreds of people being murdered in horrific attacks.

Several thousand young Europeans from Muslim immigrant backgrounds or freshly converted heeded the call to do battle. They left the impoverished banlieues in their countries behind and headed to the "Shām" for indoctrination and military training. Some of them returned home to kill their fellow citizens by "legitimate terrorism" as the holy texts instructed the Salafists to do. One of the chief activists in this complex web was the French-Tunisian Boubaker al-Hakim, born in the Parisian district of Buttes-Chaumont. In *Dabiq*, the Islamic State's online English publication, he wrote in March 2015:

> I say to my brothers in France: do not look for specific targets, kill anybody! All the *kuffar* over there are targets! . . . I say to them: soon, by Allah's permission, you will see the banner of *La ilah ila Allah* ["There is no god but Allah"—the Islamic State flag] fluttering over the Elysee Palace—[the French presidential residence].

> The Islamic State is close now. By Allah's permission, the march is advancing towards you. And, inshallah, your women and children will be sold by us in the markets of the Islamic State!

In less than five years, the enthusiasm of the universal democratic slogans of the "Spring" and of their "Revolution 2.0" had turned into the fatal Salafist backwardness expressed in those lines written from Raqqa. In the end, the Islamic State's "caliphate" isolated itself through its own extremism, and during the military offensive of 2017 it was wiped off the face of the earth. However, it also weakened and fragmented the Sunnism of which it had wrongfully proclaimed itself the herald.

* * *

When Tarek Bouazizi, the fruit and vegetable seller, set himself on fire on December 17, 2010, his act could have been interpreted as the classic jihadist "martyrdom operation" of the twenty-first century. Rather, it countered it. Suicide had become terror's most blatant operational mode for speeding up the end of "unbelief" by spreading death and demoralization. Bouazizi, however, differed from the "volunteer martyrs" (*inghimassi*) of jihad: he did not try to kill anyone but himself. (He succumbed to his injuries in a hospital the following month.) Witness statements would suggest that the self-contained way in which he carried out his act resembled how Buddhist monks self-immolated fifty years earlier, during the Vietnam war. It was not a typical al-Qaeda attack, but the outcome of an individual process. Instead of a militant act prompted by ideology, it mixed social hopelessness with the humiliation of having your face slapped by a policewoman. The unfortunate man had no known partisan or religious affiliations.

Bouazizi could not have imagined how his act would be reinterpreted by the town's jobless graduates and dissident unionists close to the Marxist extreme left. They turned him into a figurehead of "the people" because he had been exploited; in time, he would acquire mythical status. He became the martyred icon of the "Arab revolutions" as proclaimed from Tunis to Bahrain in 2011, with their symbolic slogan of "the people call for the regime's fall" (*ash shaʿb yurid isqat an nizam*).

The notion of a people made supreme by "demo-cracy"—the word derives from the Greek *dèmos*—runs counter to the Islamist canon, which

instead offers the concept of the *umma*, the Community of Believers. This entity chooses its members first on the basis of religious affiliation, then by how intensely they commit to making *sharia* the law of the land. For the Salafists, there can never be popular sovereignty, because sovereignty is exclusively Allah's purview. No political body can justly legislate unless it strictly abides by His word.

The threat posed by al-Qaeda had struck the United States to its core, to the extent that Washington held off criticizing regimes in the Mediterranean Middle East as authoritarian and corrupt so long as they acted as bulwarks against jihadist terrorism. Emboldened by such forbearance, the three despots ruling over the eastern part of coastal North Africa enjoyed remarkable longevity in office. In Tunisia, (November 1987 to January 2011) Zine El Abidine Ben Ali had been in power for nearly twenty-five years, Muammar Gaddafi had kept his grip on Libya for forty-two years (August 1969 to August 2011), and Hosni Mubarak ruled Egypt for three decades (October 1981 to February 2011). The extreme rapacity of the ruling powers had even the upper classes, which profited while the public lacked freedom, suffering under the political system. Boundless corruption, predation, and cronyism thus had considerably eroded the social backing across the board for the regimes in place.

Contributing to this were the dynastic tendencies of the three despots. Ben Ali rained excessive privileges on Leila Trabelsi, his second wife and a hairdresser by profession, as well as on her kin. Mubarak did the same for his son, Gamal, and Gaddafi did so for his favorite child, Seif al-Islam, and his brothers. This alienated the Tunisian and Egyptian middle classes, and what was left of it in Libya. Th urban groups, from which the military officers came, in each country would quickly dissociate themselves from their regimes. After several weeks of unrest, they were ready to make common cause, at least temporarily, with the impoverished young people to accelerate the transfer of power.

This distancing became clear when the Tunisian general staff refused to back up the police who were trying to contain the demonstrations in the capital. The military leadership further confirmed its sympathies when it sent Ben Ali off in an airplane on January 14, 2011. This happened less than a month after Bouazizi had self-immolated. In Egypt, it was the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces that dismissed Mubarak on February 11, barely eighteen days after the occupation of Tahrir Square had started.

The slogan "the army and the people are the fingers of one hand" (*al gaysh wa-sh shaʿb id wahed*) became a popular slogan.

The dissolution of governance during the century's first decade was not the only problem. Added to the mix of grievances were not just the structural problems the regimes ignored, but also economic calamities that functioned as triggers. An OECD report published in December 2011 titled "The Socioeconomic Context and Impact of the 2011 Events in the Middle East and North Africa Region" highlighted a surprising increase in youth unemployment in the region between 2005 and 2010. Only in the oil monarchies of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) was it masked by massive civil service employment. Everywhere else in the region, it was the highest in the world after Sub-Saharan Africa—little wonder, given that the under-25 age group made up half of the population (peaking at 65 percent in Yemen).

Demographics were outstripping economic growth and an already bloated public sector was approaching maximum capacity. Tunisia, where the fuse was lit and the associations of "unemployed graduates" took a leading role, perfectly illustrates these trends. In 2010, the lack of jobs affected at least 30 percent of its fifteen- through twenty-four-year-olds. In Egypt, it affected 25 percent. Even more dire, in both countries, 15 percent of university graduates were officially unemployed (the real rate was certainly higher). This young, educated population was the engine powering the start of the uprisings, and it came up with the first slogans. In a phenomenon long known to sociologists, they grew out of the "relative deprivation" of would-be elites blocked from rising socially at the dawn of the revolutionary process.

In the end, other events brought the decade's hidden tensions to the surface. One was the sharp rise in the price of food. Global warming and resulting fires had devastated the grain fields of several exporting countries, Australia and Russia foremost. The Arab world, a net importer of grain, saw commodity prices increase by roughly one-third between late 2009 and early 2011. Then the rise in oil and gas prices severely affected countries that produced little or no oil, among them Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, and Syria, which were already coping with insurrections. The cost per barrel rose from U.S. $62 to U.S. $103, which resulted in doubling the price of butane gas canisters widely used for cooking. Historians and economists have long known that grain and flour price inflation had a major impact on

starting the French Revolution in July 1789, when paying for bread could devour half of a commoner's income. In today's Arab world (excepting the oil monarchies), basic foodstuffs still represent a big part of the lower middle-class housewife's shopping basket. The sudden jump in food prices in the winter of 2010–2011 sparked furious defiance of regimes whose despotism had been tolerated so long as there was still the hope of even a modest rise in the standard of living. Now, in this desperate atmosphere, the slogan of the Egyptian left—*Kifaya*! ("enough is enough")—which had barely resonated until then, was now heard everywhere. In the streets of Tunis, they added the colloquial French-Maghrebian expression *Digaj*! ("get out of here!"—from French "dégage!") to their diatribe against the powers that be.

The Two Great Types of Revolutionary Situations of the "Arab Spring"

Looking past the multiple twists and turns of fate specific to each of the six main uprisings during the winter of 2010–2011, in hindsight we can distinguish between two major types. Each, in turn, reflects three distinct national situations.

The coastal states of eastern North Africa—Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya—comprise the first type. They ousted their rulers quickly, whether by exiling, jailing, or executing them. To achieve these outcomes, civil society in each country managed to sustain the revolutionary process. One key reason was a relative ethnic and confessional sameness that let them forge temporary alliances to different degrees among social classes. They collaborated in pulling down the regime, temporarily putting aside all antagonisms in a "moment of enthusiasm." This was the famous phrase by which Karl Marx described the "spring of the peoples" of the European revolutions of 1848. Although separated by a century and a half, that spring and the "Arab Spring" of our time are strikingly similar, if we consider that both were democratic phenomena, gave rise to immense hopes, and would fail in the end. Except for Egypt, where the mainly Orthodox Coptic Christian minority equals about 8 percent of the population (but stripped of political clout), the three countries are almost exclusively Sunni and of Arab lineage. The only exceptions are the Ibadi Berbers of the Nefusa Mountains and the city of

Zuwara in Libya, and of Djerba island in Tunisia, and the black Africans of Libya's Fezzan. Lacking the necessary internal resources or international connections. these minorities could not weigh in on the shared future.

And yet, after their respective dictators' fall, each state embarked on a different path—all of them ultimately impacted by terrorism. Tunisia was the exception, in that it installed a democratic parliamentary government. Here, Islamist and secular parties alternated in taking power peacefully. The uprising allowed Tunisia to reconnect with a long history characterized—until the Bourguiba era—by modernizing reform movements as far back as the nineteenth century. However, considerable socioeconomic weaknesses burdened its future, allowing the jihadists to emerge in 2012.

In Egypt, the July 2012 election of a president who was a card-carrying member of the Muslim Brotherhood was followed a year later by a revolt, encouraged by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, that advocated a return to military rule. There, again, history cast its long shadow. It revived the governing mode of the Mamelukes, a non-hereditary military dynasty that predated Egypt's modernist and reformist orientation, which prevailed from nineteenth-century Egypt to the 1950s, when Nasser's populist dictatorship swept it away. And, under the ensuing regime of Marshal el-Sisi, jihadism started to raise its head again, most notably in the Sinai Peninsula.

In Libya, Western intervention played a crucial role in Gaddafi's downfall. It substituted for the internal social dynamics that were too weakened by the unbelievable brutality and omnipresence of his tyranny. A primitive splintering of the country among tribes competing for trickles of oil revenues prevented reassembly of a viable political entity. Moreover, some regions came under the temporary control of jihadists. And this "failed" Libyan state became the main jumping-off point for the clandestine trafficking of Africans to Europe, a continuation of the historical Muslim trade in black slaves. If the balance sheet of the "Spring," with the exception of Tunisia, is fairly calamitous on a scale that we will analyze below, these three countries, although partly exposed to terrorism, at least did not have to cope with a major split between Sunni and Shiites and its dire consequences.

The second type of "Arab Spring" was characterized by Bahrain, Yemen, and Syria. Located in the eastern half of the Arab world, these countries experienced a religious disintegration that had more of a political impact than in North Africa. Their uprisings were taken hostage, immediately or gradually, by sectarian revolts. These trumped any potential alliances among

social classes that might have let the people "bring down the regime," as the famous slogan demanded. There scarcely existed a unified "people" that could conceivably make this demand where the fault lines intersected as the established order faltered.

Bahrain's revolt was the first one that was put down by sectarian motives. Here, a permanent protest against the dynasty had taken over Pearl Square, in the capital city of Manama. It was an imitation of Tahrir Square—only in Cairo it ended on February 11, with the army deposing Mubarak. The majority of the demonstrators in Pearl Square, like the Bahrain population, were Shiites. That they were confronting a Sunni royal family was a prime factor in Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, and Qatar intervening on March 14. With Bahrain, they were all members of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC). Solidarity among sovereigns also carried weight in this decision, as did the risks of having an unstable—and destabilizing—island situated near the major Saudi oil fields and the Qatari gas industry.

Sectarian hostility played a comparable role in Yemen and in Syria but along different lines. In Yemen, the GCC oil monarchies had been worrying for years about Iranian activism among the Zaydi population, which made up the majority of the populace in the northern mountains and in Sanaʿa, the capital of the unified state formed by reintegrating the former South Yemen in May 1990. However, this branch of Shiism had minimized its differences with Sunnism to the point where their followers prayed in the same mosques. I observed this singular arrangement personally as late as the 1990s. It contrasted sharply with the Twelver Shia of Lebanon or Iraq as well as Bahrain, in which case the lines dividing places of worship and dogmas of each denomination were very explicit.

Around this time, aggressive Salafist preaching had begun to make itself heard in northern Yemen. It came with deep pockets and it targeted Zaydi "heretics," converting their children to Sunnism while excommunicating the parents. The reaction was not long in coming. It took the form of the Houthi movement, whose name derived from the family at its head. Under threat, its followers moved closer to majority international Shiism, and Teheran would soon detect in these new associates a kind of up-and-coming Hezbollah. This is also how the Saudis saw it. They were haunted by the vision of an armed faction aligned with Iran installed on their southern border.

At first, the Yemen insurrection in the spring of 2011, a mix of tribal and regional considerations, succeeded in removing the former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. It seemed then that the process might evolve into a form of democratization based on the traditional tribal ways of negotiating and striking compromises. However, in September 2014 the Houthis instead moved out of their stronghold in the country's northwest and took the capital of Sanaʿa. This triggered the retaliatory mechanism that ended in the Saudi-Emirates military intervention the following year. From then on, Yemen became the second front in the rivalry between the Sunni and Shiite blocs, paralleling the one across which they had faced off already in the Levant.

It was indeed in the Syria-Iraq space that the "Arab revolutions" mutated into intra-Muslim religious wars devolving into chaos. At the start, only Syria was affected by democratic protests. Iraq was caught up in the logics of intra-communal massacres given free rein by the departure of American troops in the fall of 2011. The early unrest in Syria gradually took on a sectarian coloration: teenagers would paint the slogan "the people call for the regime's fall" on a wall. After their arrest, a protest demonstration would end in deaths. These would be avenged by burning local offices of the Baath party in power. It would end with paratroopers taking over a mosque and killings in the place of worship. The democratic forces had wished to transcend religious confessionalism and model their actions on the Egyptian events, where Muslims and Christians had marched in unison to oust Mubarak. The Syrian resistance wanted to get rid of Bashar al-Assad in the same manner. Every Friday, they organized theme-based marches. Then, with desertions by Sunni soldiers multiplying, they formed the "Free Syrian Army." However, revolutionary unity would be shattered by sectarian pressures.

The opposition was heavily Sunni and gained footholds in the urban and rural working-class districts inhabited by followers of this majority denomination. The loyalists, in return, united around the Alawite sectarian bond and interests beholden to the regime. They were concentrated on the Mediterranean coast and in the capital. Starting in the summer of 2012, when the insurgents had taken over most of Aleppo, the Syrian rebellion would teeter between regional logics of religious hostility. On the one hand, the petrodollars flowing to the armed groups from the Arabian Peninsula sped up the inroads Salafist and jihadist ideology made in their midst. The financiers wanted them to spearhead the resistance against Iran expanding its

influence in the Levant. On the other hand, Teheran committing its Revolutionary Guards and other Shiite proxies especially Lebanese Hezbollah to defend the Assad regime saved it from the expected collapse. At the same time, however, it aligned the Damascus ruler in the "Shiite crescent" that benefited from the decisive military and diplomatic support of Vladimir Putin's Russia.

This is how the Sunni insurrection in Iraq's western provinces linked up with the one in eastern Syria along the Euphrates valley to Aleppo and the Turkish border. It was led by the "Islamic State in Iraq," the organization inspired by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, which would subsequently call itself the "Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant" (Shām) and go down in history in English as ISIS or ISIL and in French under its Arab acronym: *Daesh*. ISIS took Raqqa in 2013 and followed by seizing Mosul in June 2014. For the next three years, until it lost both cities again in the fall of 2017, the "Islamic State"—the *dawla*, as its followers called their self-styled caliphate—became the monstrous end result, the evil offspring of the democratic aspirations of the "Arab Spring." It was the crowning of the third-generation jihad strategy originally laid out by al-Zarqawi and al-Suri. This incarnation on Levantine territory of the Islamist "counter utopia," obsessed with purifying the social body with massacres, grafted itself onto the sectarian fragmentation and intensified it. Its violence was coordinated with the terrorism that struck the heart of Europe from 2015 to 2017. It also hit North Africa, the source of sizable contingents of foreign fighters for ISIS. In this sense, the ISIS caliphate constitutes the speculum that lets us observe contemporary jihadism *in vivo* as an ideology that would come to wreak cataclysmic havoc on the Mediterranean Middle East.

To understand its full scope, the pages that follow will look back on the eight years that separate the flowering of the "Arab Spring" from the final fall of ISIS. This retrospective will trace the sequence of events in each of the major countries involved. A genealogical interpretation will be proposed for approaching the differing dynamics of the Mediterranean coast and the Persian Gulf. At the same time, these pages will seek to describe the contamination that the mushrooming of jihadism effected. Most notably, it inflamed the antagonism between Sunnism and Shiism. This is steadily becoming the major fault line running through the conflicts tearing the region apart. And these conflicts are having a lasting effect on its fragile relations with the rest of the world.

SIX

From the Fall of Despots to Societies in Turmoil

Tunisian Democracy, between Social Divide and Jihadist Peril

Tunisia was the first of the "Arab Spring" countries to have its "revolution." It is also the only one that succeeded in replacing its dictatorship with liberal institutions, something to which it aspired from the start. The constitution adopted in January 2015 thus could be hailed as "the most democratic in the Arab world." This rarity is explained by a resilient, relatively numerous middle class educated in Arab and French bilingual secondary schools that were legacies of Bourguibaism and the French Protectorate. It could also draw on sources that led to a reform of mindsets and administration starting in the nineteenth century. At the time, Tunisia had courageous statesmen who knew how to fit their country into the Muslim and Ottoman universe, but also how to mold its own identity and modernize it. This was reinforced by integrating a group of people made up in part by Janissaries of European origin and diverse prisoners Tunisian pirates had captured on the high seas or in coastal raids. Once these outsiders had converted to Islam, they endowed the country's coastal region with a cosmopolitan elite whose descendants still stand out today.

Of the six "Arab Spring" countries, Tunisia was also geographically the closest to Europe. A large share of the population consequently was more in tune with democratic systems and how they worked. Nearly a tenth of Tunisian nationals lived abroad, the vast majority in France, who regularly

traveled back and forth with the *bled* (homeland). Working out some complex compromises, this extensive middle class piloted the transition after the dictatorship ended. With the latter's disappearance, long-submerged social structures rose again to the surface. Tunisia was fortunate to have the virtues of the past compensate for the defects of the present—even if the country's fragmentation still posed formidable challenges.

The uprising and its aftermath went through several dynamic stages. First, the provisional government laid the groundwork for a constituent assembly election. The Ennahda Islamists won them and built a coalition with two secular parties that would be nicknamed the "troika." It confronted a social crisis in which the impoverished steppe border areas in the south and mountainous west opposed the prosperous coastal regions of the northeast. It also had to deal with persistent Salafist proselytizing and jihadist violence exploiting this geographic split. When the new power proved unable to meet these challenges, civil society, unions, and employer organizations pressed for the formation in January 2014 of a government of technocrats.

Legislative and presidential elections followed, with the Nidaa Tounes secular party emerging the victor, making its founder chief of state in December. Schisms in his group, however, led him to seek support from his former Ennahda opponent for forming a national unity majority. It started governing on August 26, 2016. This Tunisian-style "grand coalition" lowered the political temperature and helped to democratize the Islamist party. Still, it was an unwieldy arrangement, and urgent reforms were slow in coming. It was a delicate balancing act for a society whose economy, mired in corruption, would not take off. Meanwhile, Libya next-door was melting down, and the persisting terrorist spectermobilized the government into budgeting large sums to fight it.

In 2015, shocking attacks on tourists at the Bardo Museum and a seaside hotel were reminders that Tunisia had supplied many foreign fighters—some estimates went as high as 4,000 to 6,000—to the Islamic State. Since Bouazizi's suicide by fire, the social and geographic divides in Tunisia had not been overcome; on the contrary, they were transferred to the ballot, emphasizing the disparity between secularists and Islamists. In the 2014 balloting, the former received the most votes in the more prosperous and populated northeast Tunisia, which made Beji Caid Essebsi president of the Republic. In the impoverished southern and western areas,

Moncef Marzouki and his Ennahda partner ran ahead where they had carried all the districts three years earlier. It was as if the democratic process kept returning to square one at Sidi Bouzid, where the uprising had started on December 17, 2010. Symbolizing the sociogeographical rupture, this town has links to the port city of Sfax, with its big business and olive groves, but also to the expanse of barren steppe devoid of resources that Bouazizi's family called home.

The Sidi Bouzid Spark

The political process set in motion in Tunisia by the young street vendor's suicide made possible a temporary but crucial democratic interaction between social classes. It was an element missing in Egypt and Libya, the other two North African coastal countries whose regimes would also be overthrown. At first, extreme left militant groups of unemployed graduates acted as yeast for the movement. Within just a few days, it connected the province with the capital's populous outskirts, swollen by a rural exodus. By occupying the public space, the pressure these young people from the impoverished banlieues put on the authoritarian grid imposed by the ruling powers suddenly overwhelmed it.

At the same time, the combination of the regime's rapacity, massive unemployment, and bad governance was exacerbated by the sharp rise in food prices. It now emboldened the urban middle classes to confront Ben Ali head-on. It did not matter if people had accommodated themselves to the dictatorship or lived in terror of its ubiquitous repressive police—they all now saw their chance to overthrow the despot. They would do it by allying themselves with the poor youth population, who had taken over the street for good, demanding "bread and dignity." This and other social demands mixed more or less happily with the "liberty and democracy" slogans chanted by the residents of the more well-to-do parts of Tunis. The military hierarchy, which came from the same middle class, refused to back up the police in putting down the insurrection. (Some years before the uprising, when I had been invited to lecture at the general staff college, I remember being struck by the liberated tone that prevailed there, very different from the university that was locked down by the intelligence services.) This made it possible to kick the president out quickly with minimal loss of life.

During the transition that followed Ben Ali's forced departure on January 14, 2011, residents from the capital's bourgeois districts at first shared control of the provisional government with people from the coastal towns. However, some of these had compromised with the former regime, or had only opposed it halfheartedly, and vengeance-seeking pressures from the street made it impossible for them to remain in power.

Nevertheless, a general atmosphere of freedom following decades of dictatorship prevailed. It led to the freeing of all political prisoners and the return of exiles in February and March 2011. Diverse Islamist actors were suddenly free to appear on the political scene. The propaganda discourse they developed linked their loathing of the fallen power to its secularity. This animosity had been on display during the Habib Bourguiba era (1956–1987), although Bourguiba's successor Zineddin Ben Ali had distanced himself from it. He had an immense minaret erected in Carthage and paraded himself on the pilgrimage to Mecca, seeking to adapt to the insidious Islamization that had been rearing its head in Tunisia since the 1970s. He even sought to use it to his advantage. However, identifying secularity with the unbelief of an unjust ruler usurping divine sovereignty is a truism in Islamist rhetoric. Doing so was even more expedient because the imprisoned militants, Ennahda cadres especially, had been subjected to outrages, including torture. This gave them the aura of quintessential victims, even among their secular adversaries. The return of Ennahda's founder Rached Ghannouchi on March 31, 2011 helped turn it into a disciplined party endowed with an ideology, in stark contrast to a secular movement that was spread too thinly across numerous small groups. Some of these, in any event, were nothing more than vehicles for the personal ambitions of their respective leaders.

Meanwhile, the intensified social demands from the impoverished neighborhoods were taken up by the growing numbers of Salafists supplanting the leftists that had started the revolution. They also took advantage of the disappearance of a discredited police force to substitute adherence to sharia for the failing public order—that is, as long as it was not just a proxy for rackets, extortion, and assault, as had been the case during the Algerian jihad of the 1990s in the areas controlled by the Armed Islamic Group (GIA). The anxieties roiling the middle classes were deepened by the freeing, in a spasm of revolutionary fervor, of terrorists, some of them veterans of the Afghan, Chechen, or Iraqi battlefields. The most famous was

a native of Menzel Bourguiba near Bizerte who called himself "Abu Ayyad al-Tunisi" (Seifallah ben Hassine). On bin Laden's behalf, he had masterminded the assassination by two Belgian Maghrebis of Commander Ahmad Shah Massoud in Afghanistan on September 9, 2001. Al-Tunisi also had links to the attackers of the Djerbian synagogue of El Ghriba in April 2002. Upon his release from prison, he founded the Ansar al-Sharia organization ("Partisans of Islamic Law"). It would become the major Tunisian jihadist group, combining intensive proselytizing and clandestine activities until it was banned in August 2013 for murdering secular politicians.

Thus, the Ennahda Movement came to be regarded by at least part of Tunisia's middle class (even some secularists) as the sole organization capable of assuring public order. In the public mind, it had two things going for it: some of its leaders had been persecuted by the hated deposed regime. Also, in restoring order, it did not upset the social hierarchies very much, in a trade-off for the increased Islamization of the political sphere. On February 21, 2011, violent protests by the poor in front of the Kasbah, seat of the provisional government, raised fears of uncontrolled rioting and the start of class warfare. The subsequent move to install Ennahda, a party born from the Muslim Brotherhood, at the head of the government when it won the October 2011 Constituent Assembly elections had special backing. It came from the High Commission for the Achievement of the Objectives of the Revolution, a body comprised of independent jurists Tunisians had created to steer the transition. It had no equivalent in any other country in which an "Arab revolution" had occurred. The proportional balloting it organized limited the landslide that majority voting would have produced, forcing Ennahda to form a coalition with two secular parties. These were the extreme left Congress for the Republic (CPR) presided over by Moncef Marzouki and the social-democratic Takattol ("Democratic Bloc") led by Mustapha Ben Jafar. Together, they would form the government nicknamed "The Troika." In this way, Tunisia avoided the fate of Egypt, where the Islamists, by scooping up three-quarters of the seats, set up a violent confrontation with the army.

Nineteenth-century Russians used to pull their mud- or snowbound cars out with a team of three horses. The middle or shaft horse did the work, pulling with its head down while the two flanking it were whipped into a gallop. The comparison is apt with the Tunisian coalition, in which each member pulled at their own pace to bring the differing energies

of social, regional, and complementary ideologies to bear. A native son of the country's neglected south, Moncef Marzouki, a neurologist educated in France where he lived and practiced for years, became the first brown-skinned Tunisian chief of state (although it was only a symbolic post during the transitional period of 2011 to 2014). Mustapha Ben Jafar, blond haired and blue eyed, from an Ottoman lineage, became president of the Assembly.

Ennahda designated the engineer Hamadi Jebali as prime minister—the real power broker. He was a graduate of Arts et Métiers, the elite engineering Parisian school. Hailing from the coastal town of Sousse, he embodied the stream within the Movement that was most open to political compromise with the secularists and the middle class. In 1987, he had planted a bomb in a hotel in the city of his birth, for which he later formally apologized. On October 29, 2011, a few days before taking office, he granted me an interview. He said that the party had abandoned the totalitarian legacy of the Muslim Brotherhood, which had been modeled on communist organizations, in favor of a social-democratic orientation. He rejected the strategy of Algeria's FIS (Islamic Salvation Front), which led to civil war and political breakdown in the 1990s. Instead, he approvingly cited the Turkish Justice and Development Party (AKP) as the ideal, hoping it would get him support from Europe and the United States.

A year later, on September 12, 2012, it was President of Tunisia Moncef Marzouki who described the Ennahda militants to me as "democrats with a strong religious streak—like the European Christian Democrats—and, on the social level, rather liberal-conservative." He tasked CPR, his own party, with the role of "leading deep-going social reforms." After a year in business, the Troika had to deal with persistent tensions boiling up from the Tunisia of the disenfranchised, and Marzouki predicted an electoral loss if these reforms were not implemented—he would be proved right two years later. He was sure that the Salafists were the "ideological mask that only served to express the social demands of the poor."

However, Marzouki's reading of the situation, mirroring the standard Marxist downplaying of religion as mere superstructure, was wide of the mark. Its error was in not paying attention to the cultural rupture around which the Ennahda Movement, and its violent expression as jihadism, organized society's lines of fracture. It also failed to see that they derided the idea of class struggle. In fact, while belonging to the "disinherited"

is a powerful mobilizing engine, rigorous Islamic expression redraws the confrontation between bourgeoisie and proletariat in totally different terms—as a battle determined by "allegiance and disavowal," or *al-wala wal bara'a*. This Koranic expression has become the operative phrase and principal slogan of Salafists and jihadists alike.

As they construe it, there are the true believers (who swear "allegiance" to the revealed Truth and its interpreters), versus the apostates, heretics, and unbelievers, from which the first "disavow themselves". This rupture is absolute and makes living side by side in the same social body impossible. There remained only two choices then: either set up enclaves that would metastasize to envelop all humanity (as the Salafists wished), or establish an entity purified by terror and massacre (of which the ISIS "caliphate" would become the ultimate expression between 2014 and 2017).

In Tunisia, starting in mid-2012, the consensus between "moderate" Islamists and secularists embodied by the Troika was tripped up by these challenges. Whether or not to go along with the extremists translated into a fundamental difference about the nature of the constitution, the reference to Islam embodied in it, and the acceptance of freedom of conscience. This was the deal breaker between Ennahda and the secular middle classes. The latter had given the Movement its due, but accused it of weakness responsible for the growing jihadist violence that reached a peak with the dramatic attacks of 2015. This would upset the political balance of power, starting in 2013, to Ennahda's detriment. It would also make Rached Ghannouchi's positioning evolve.

The Salafists debuted their strategy of confrontation at the University of Manuba, an eminently symbolic place on the capital's outskirts. They moved to take over its Faculty of Letters and Humanities, which they regarded as a bastion of unbelief. They insisted on female students covering their faces with a full veil (*niqab*), forcibly took over the dean's office, hauled down the Tunisian flag down to replace it with the caliphate's black and white banner with its Islamic profession of faith. All this happened in November 2011 just as the Troika started its work. The Salafists took advantage of some Ennahda ministers' lenient attitude to continue disturbing campus life as they drove to dominate the balance of power. Their principal agitator, the jihadist Mohamed Bakhti, released from prison in March 2011, told me that they aimed to "to expel the professors, all atheists and watch dogs of the French who brainwashed them."

Next, after the university, in June 2012 the art scene came into the Salafists' crosshairs. They trashed an exhibition in the Abdellia Palace in La Marsa, a town in the capital's residential suburbs. The victimized visual artists were then the ones prosecuted, with the concurrence of the public prosecutor's office, for "violating the sacred." This referred specifically to an installation of female heads covered in scarves sticking out of a heap of stones wrapped in religious texts that called for the stoning of adulterers. The charges put on display that part of the judiciary was vulnerable to being infiltrated by the Salafists. A comparable situation arose in Egypt in 1995. The judges there had automatically divorced a professor, Nasr Abu Zayd, from his wife against the couple's will on the grounds of his "apostasy." The charge had been leveled by Islamists, and was enough to dissolve the marriage tie between a Muslim woman and a spouse who would henceforth be excommunicated.

And it would be at Sidi Bouzid, ground zero for the Arab revolutions, that the confrontation in the symbolic and normative domain the Salafists sought to dominate culturally would take on material form. The Ansar al-Sharia association led by Abu Ayyad occupied the town's main mosque located on the newly named "Mohamed Bouazizi Avenue." The jihadists called it *Tawhid* ("divine oneness") mosque, which is the key precept in their ideology. In its name, they excommunicated all their enemies accused as idolaters, and therefore of practicing polytheism of one kind or another. Their aim was to seize control of the uprising and capture its momentum for their own program. On September 5, 2012, the city's last bar that still served beer was ransacked.

Two days later, as Friday prayers let out, Tawhid mosque's preacher informed me that Bouazizi could not be called a "martyr" as popular sentiment routinely made him out to be. He stated, "He did not sacrifice himself in the Way of Allah . . . but the desperate youth of Sidi Buzid, today will follow in the Way of Allah!" Then he made clear where his movement diverged from Ennahda: "They favor democracy, which represents unbelief, and we excommunicate democracy as contrary to divine sovereignty, for if the majority of people agree on sin then sin becomes law. Their objectives are good—install the Islamic State—but their methods are bad."

* * *

Banners hung by the mosque exit soliciting contributions by the faithful to the Salafist collection box showed photos of atrocities committed by the army of Bashar al-Assad—labeled "Shiite"—against Syrian "Muslims"—by extension, Sunni. Shiism dated back to ancient times in Tunisia, when the Fatimid caliphate, who followed that creed, founded its first capital Mahdia ("city of the Messiah") in the tenth century. It still survived in the traditional devotions. In fact, a discreet contemporary revival started when the fame of Lebanese Hezbollah and its leader Hassan Nasrallah convinced some Arab nationalists that the Party of God alone was capable of fighting Israel. In the popular imagination, the fight against Zionism and for the Palestinian cause always trumped the intra-Muslim conflicts. But Ansar al-Sharia shifted the line demarcating Good and Evil inside Islam so that it lay between true believers and apostates. It claimed to incarnate the former while it excommunicated the latter along with assorted other heretics. In the process, it goaded its followers to leave for Shām to train in armed jihad against al-Assad "the Shiite."

At the weekly souk on Saturday, September 8, 2012, the day after my exit interview with the preacher at the Tawhid mosque, they unfurled the same banner in the middle of the marketplace. This signaled social control and moral order in the poorer neighborhoods. I chanced to run into Abu Ayyad himself two days later in front of this same mosque, his presence there witness to the importance the jihadists assigned to making the Sidi Bouzid revolutionary icon their own. The exchange with him went quickly downhill, however, when a French-Tunisian in his entourage, speaking in the accents of the Paris Islamic banlieues, singled me out as an "enemy of Allah." This would be one of the famous terrorist's last public sightings. On September 14, a YouTube video posted by a California Copt titled "The Innocence of Muslims" was judged by Islamists to be offensive to the Prophet. In retaliation, from the al-Fath ("the conquest") main mosque in the Tunisian capital, Abu Ayyad called on the faithful to vent their anger against America, resulting in the United States diplomatic chancery and an adjoining school being torched. In Libya, Ansar al-Sharia's sister organization had just killed the American ambassador during an assault on the consulate in Benghazi on September 11, the anniversary of the "blessed double raid" of 2001 against New York and Washington.

The Democratic Surge against Salafism

The day before the torching, I raised the question of Salafism and violence with Rached Ghannouchi. For Ennadha's president, the abuses could be blamed on "oppression during the Ben Ali era"; those who carried them out were "victims, unemployed youth, ex-convicts." He thought that Salafism would be extinguished with the expansion of the "moderate current in political Islam." It would co-opt them and show them the light, like the Social Democrats had done for the European ultra-left. Not fully grasping the problem, the party apparatus seemed to think it was a case of youth needing to sow its wild oats, and Ghannouchi cited his own youthful radicalism as having mellowed with time.

A number of observers at the time regarded this sort of talk as appeasement. In the months and years to come, in the face of the campaign of attacks and assassinations, it would no longer hold water. Worry about the escalating violence reached into pious middle-class ranks, tipping the fall elections of 2014 and costing Ennahda its parliamentary majority. Three weeks after the meeting with Ghannouchi in Tunis, I met him again in Doha on October 8, 2012. He was the star attraction at a conference sponsored by Qatar for the purpose of promoting dialogue between nationalists and the Muslim Brotherhood. The latter would guide the former with the motive of capturing the momentum of the uprisings. The natural gas emirate gave U.S.$1.5 billion to the Tunisian Troika for this purpose. All the Brotherhood nobles were in attendance at Doha—this included the organization's Syrian, Egyptian, Sudanese, and, notably, Palestinian leaders.

Soon after, in early 2013 violence descended on Tunisia. As prescribed by the third-generation jihadism theorized by al-Suri and al-Zarqawi, it targeted first the "apostates" represented by law enforcement officers and secular politicians. Next on the list were "impious" tourists. It proceeded initially by mirroring the growing Syrian conflict, where thousands of Tunisians were fighting, then emulated the terror in Europe, which also involved many binational Tunisian individuals. On February 6, 2013, the Arab nationalist lawyer Chokri Belaid was assassinated. His funeral brought out a million people—more than the demonstration of January 14, 2011 that had hastened the fall of Ben Ali. The member of Parliament for Sidi Bouzid, Mohamed Brahmi, met the same fate on July 25—the anniversary of the

abolition of the beylicate, followed by the proclamation of the Tunisian Republic by Bourguiba, in 1957.

The two execution-style murders were claimed in December of the following year by Boubaker El Hakim, the veteran French-Tunisian jihadist from the Buttes Chaumont neighborhood of Paris. In his video communiqué from Syrian territory, where he had become one of the principal ISIS cadres, he decreed that Tunisia was a "land of war" (*dar al-harb*) where armed jihad waged against one and all was now licit. However, the immediate effect of the two assasinations was to destabilize Ennahda. The head of the government, Hamadi Jebali, resigned in the days following the Chokri Belaid assassination. His successor, Ali Laarayedh, threw in the towel after the Brahmi murder. A large part of Tunisian public opinion blamed the Islamic party, including some who had voted for it in 2011, for letting the radical Salafists run amok.

The way out of the deadlock linked to the terrorist crisis would be crafted by another independent body like the High Authority of 2011. This one went by the name National Dialogue Quartet and had the backing of even more powerful social forces than the earlier panel. It brought together the UGTT (Tunisian General Labor Union), the UTICA (Tunisian Union of Industry, Trade, and Handicrafts) employer association, the Tunisian Human Rights League, and the Tunisian Lawyers Association. This coalition saw the light of day after Mohamed Brahmi's assassination, which took place just as the mass demonstrations against President Mohamed Morsi shook Egypt, leading to his removal from office by the army. Elected in June 2012, Morsi had Islamicized the political sphere to such a degree that it resembled what the most intransigent of Ennahda's militants could only dream of. This included Leagues for the Protection of the Revolution that hounded the neighborhood secular associations.

Morsi's dismissal, followed by violent suppression of the Brotherhood, worried Ghannouchi deeply. It led him to sign on to a compromise for the sake of preserving his vital interests. At the time, his party was drawing heavy criticism for having, if not colluded with the jihadists, at least given them a free hand. It bothered the moderates even among his electoral base. Ghannouchi agreed to having the Quartet draw up a road map that would end with the Troika's resignation, the writing of a secular constitution, and the appointment of a team of technocrats. This then cleared the way in January 2014 for Mehdi Jomaa, a French-Tunisian top executive of the

Total oil conglomerate, to step in as interim prime minister until the legislative and presidential elections that autumn. The secular Nida Tunis party and its founder Beji Caid Essebsi would emerge victorious from them. Essebsi, a former Bourguiba minister who had put distance between himself and Ben Ali before serving as interim head of the government in 2011, was then elected president. His campaign received substantial support from the United Arab Emirates, who sought to counter rival Qatar's sponsorship of Ennahda. For its efforts, the Quartet received the Nobel Peace Prize the following year, and were praised for having safeguarded the democratic transition in Tunisia.

This noteworthy international recognition, if anything, made it even less likely that the jihadists would be laying down their arms—not with Tunisia henceforth led by a secular party, guided by a constitution that respected the "freedom of conscience," the bane of the Islamists! Tunisia was unique among Arab countries in achieving this, as the academic Arabist Dominique Avon demonstrated with supporting texts in his June 2014 article, "The Tunisian Constitution and the Issue of Individual Freedom." However, the country had been decreed a "country of war" by Boubaker El Hakim in 2014 after ISIS in June of that same year proclaimed its self styled caliphate in the newly captured Mosul. Law in the caliphate was then reduced to putting into practice literal, Salafist interpretations of Koranic precepts. And the "*dawla*" (Islamic State) from that time on controlled important infrastructures of the territories it took over. That allowed it to coordinate and project terrorist actions from conquered areas, including a country like Tunisia whence several thousand of its foreign fighters had come.

Infiltrating Tunisia across the porous Libyan border was easy once that state had collapsed following Gaddafi's demise. While Paris reeled from the slaughter at *Charlie Hebdo* and the Hypercacher supermarket in January 2015, two jihadists on March 18 massacred tourists visiting the antiquities at Tunisia's Bardo Museum, with twenty-two dead. Next, thirty-eight more vacationers were slain by a submachine gun-wielding terrorist on a hotel beach near Sousse. That same day, in France, the chief executive of a company was beheaded by an employee who stuck the severed head on a pike between pro-ISIS banners before sending a photo of it to a correspondent in Shām. ISIS also claimed the two Tunisian massacres. The murderers had been trained in a camp located at Sabratha, a Libyan town near the border.

Besides the human drama, the economic consequences—estimated at a billion U.S. dollars—were catastrophic for Tunisia's tourist industry, which employed nearly 10 percent of the workforce.

The elasticity of terrorism, whose *katibas*—or brigades—trained inside Algeria and Libya, was exemplified by the beheading of a shepherd who refused to let the jihadists steal a sheep from him on November 13, 2015. It happened in a mountain range overlooking Sidi Bouzid, a few hours before the attacks on the Stade de France and the Bataclan in Paris. The shepherd's head would be found at a distance from his cadaver the next day. The date and place of this murder showed the conjunction between local, run-of-the-mill jihad and its most elaborate international projection. It was also a reminder that the town and region that sparked the Arab revolutions remained symbols of the unsolved equation linking the social problem and its capture by Islamist extremism.

On March 7, 2016, several dozen armed men claiming to be ISIS moved into the town of Ben Guerdane, a hub for Libyan contraband some nineteen miles from the Tunisian border. They killed seventy people before security forces could restore order. There it was, still a symbol of this "excluded" Tunisia in which the terrorists hoped to find important collaborators. In the 2014 elections, Ben Guerdane had flown in the face of the majority vote of the rest of the country, with 84 percent of the votes cast for former president Marzouki, who came from near there (against 16 percent for Caid Essebsi), and 70 percent for Ennahda (versus 11 percent for Nida Tunis). The ISIS raid's failure marked jihadism's first substantial military defeat and boosted the badly eroded self-confidence of the security apparatus. But it also served as a reminder that socioeconomic shortcomings were this movement's favorite focal point for grievances. This was emphasized by the title of the 2017 annual report issued by Jussur, the Tunisian think tank: "To Get Tunisia Moving Again."

Regional Fracture and Social Peril

However impressive, the democratization of the political scene had its Achilles heel. Public freedoms had indeed expanded, with freedom of conscience guaranteed by the constitution and marriage between Muslim and non-Muslim legalized. However, the virtuous work of solving social conflicts

had ground to a standstill in the Assembly of the Representatives of the People (ARP). Meetings in the Bardo Palace lacked zeal and the proceedings were undermined by schisms and the dynastic ambitions of those who, in the Arab world, are called the children of the *zaim* ("chiefs"). Two years after its electoral success, Nida Tunis, the party of the nonagenarian president of the Republic Beji Caid Essebsi lost its parliamentary primacy, to Ennadha's benefit. The modest achievements of the government led by Hammadi Essid caused the chief of state to launch a "national initiative" on June 2, 2016. Its purpose: recapture the support of the UGTT workers union and form a governing majority with its former Ennahda Islamist adversaries. However, the coalition was built on compromises that, in effect, blocked the reforms needed for closing the gap between the "two Tunisias." While the relatively prosperous northeast coast was integrated with globalization, the southern and western hinterlands were left out. They were wide open to cross-border smuggling and vectors for terrorism and corruption.

This fundamental problem, dissected in a most informative, influential report by the International Crisis Group published in May 2017 ("Blocked Transition: Corruption and Regionalism in Tunisia"), threatened the continuity of democracy itself in the only nation to have emerged with it from the Arab Spring of 2011. One of the biggest immediate challenges faced by the new prime minister, mid-forties Youssef Chahed, who took office on August 27, 2016, was expanding access to credit. At the time, credit was monopolized and channeled by hidden interests linked to the relatives of the deposed president Ben Ali. Aspiring entrepreneurs in the hinterlands were shut out by the banks and prevented from making investments and growing their local economies. Instead, they had to operate in an informal economy that also nourished jihadism.

The young prime minister set a vigorous anti-corruption campaign in motion that cleaned house in his administration. Starting in July 2017, it resulted in jail terms for influential profiteers, some of whom had been close to the former regime. Their networks called the shots during the—not always spontaneous—protest marches in January 2018 against the rise in the cost of living projected by the government's appropriations bill. Concurrently, the decriminalization of homosexuality was underway, as was legislation granting equality in inheritance to women. (Under sharia, they were entitled to just half of a man's share.) But this ferment of civil society initiatives mainly concerned the middle classes. The future of democratization would remain

in doubt unless the social fractures that sharpened the contrast between the "two Tunisias" were repaired.

Meanwhile, the return of the Islamists to the corridors of power had upset the United Arab Emirates. They felt betrayed, considering the support they had given the Nida Tunis campaign to eliminate Ennahda, that thorn in the UAE's side. The party, for all its proclaiming itself as "moderate" now, still registered on the international Muslim Brotherhood scene, godfathered by UAE's neighbor and archrival Qatar. In a fit of pique, Dubai's Emirates Airline in December 2017 barred Tunisian women from boarding its planes. The motive: the airline had been warned that female kamikaze jihadists were preparing to go after one of its airplanes. Like the other Mediterranean countries of the African shore involved in the Arab Spring, Tunisia thus found itself held hostage in the struggle for hegemony over the future of Sunnism. Egypt and Libya would show how acute the fallout from this conflict could be. In Tunisia's case, the downsides were counterbalanced by its closeness to Europe. Also, surprisingly, there was the permeability effect that a resilient, large middle class—fairly secularized, attached to French bilingualism and European democratic values—had on the lower-middle class. The latter tended to prefer speaking Arabic, and they formed the base for Ennahda as well as supplying its leaders.

In an interview I did on 2 February 2018, Sheikh Rached Ghannouchi insisted that he wanted to exercise power within a consensus (*tawafuq*) instead of through direct confrontation with his rival Nida Tunis. He would be content with a proportional ballot (such as the High Instance to Safeguard the Assets of the Revolution had introduced in 2011) that favored governmental coalitions. The Islamist party went so far as to run a Jewish candidate in the municipal elections of May 2018 in Monastir, Bourguiba's native town (where the candidate had next to no chance of success). The initiative invited diverse interpretations, but it had no precedent anywhere in the Arab world. The merciless suppression of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood in July 2013, which we will analyze below, convinced their imitators in North Africa that an authoritarian strategy of Islamizing society meant political suicide. Ennahda came out on top in these elections, but, as its leader had told me, it sought consensus. The party even gave its support to Youssef Chahed, the head of government, against the rivals in his own party, thus guaranteeing with its parliamentary majority that he would remain in power.

In 2017, the Jordanian-American academic Safwan Masri published a book titled *Tunisia: an Arab Anomaly* that was hotly debated in Tunisia and other Arab states. It rejected the widely held optimistic view of the Tunisian democratic transition as the norm, where civil wars and the return of authoritarianism were unhappy accidents. Instead, the author credited Tunisia's unique past for enabling the working of a virtuous process among social minefields. In other words, it was the exception, while the chaos prevailing elsewhere was the rule.

The traits acquired during Tunisia's long history were not encountered anywhere else in the Arab world, one that Masri knew well. He had been educated in Jordan and in the Levant, and he deplored the ground they had lost during fifty wasted years of despotism that correlated with a Salafization of minds. As such, the Ben Ali dictatorship could be an aberration, all the more easily recovered from because it was a blip in more than a century of modernization from within. This is a seductive thesis, leaving aside that its determinism could be more nuanced: it underlines that the Arab Spring uprisings could only rebuild anew by respecting deep historical structures. Hence, they had to do an inventory of their heritage, instead of losing themselves in bittersweet illusions.

In that light, the Tunisian modernization dynamic, from the days of Hayreddin Pasha, grand vizier of the Tunis regency in the third quarter of the nineteenth century down to Habib Bourguiba from 1956 to 1987, had not changed: it was still a top-down modernization engineered by political and coastal elites without penetrating into the backcountry. This dilemma, which contributed to marginalizing the southern and western regions, is still the major barrier to achieving a stable democracy in Tunisia today. And it has furnished the vector for radicalization ever since the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Sidi Bouzid.

After President Essebsi died on July 25, 2019, a few months before his tenure was to end, both parliamentary and presidential elections took place in September and October. To the surprise of many, all political parties were sent back packing by the electorate: even Ennahda, while it retained the first place in the ballot box, barely reached one-fifth of the votes. The split between secularists and Islamists lost much of its significance, while both, as incumbents, were voted out en masse. The parliament, at the time of this writing (November 2019) seemed atomized between a plurality of factions which did not bode well for

a strong government, and Rached Ghannouchi, 78, was elected president of the parliament on November 13. The Islamist leader, now always wearing a tie, benefited from the votes of his secularist competitors who seemed not to fear him much any more.

As for the presidency of the republic, the second round of the election pitted against each other two candidates who were newcomers to politics. Media tycoon Nabil Karoui, nicknamed "the Tunisian Berlusconi" came second with 28 percent—after he had been jailed during the campaign for tax evasion. The victory was carried with flying colors by a retired assistant professor of constitutional law, Qaes Saïd, with 72 percent of the vote, though he had not campaigned at all. His claims to fame were that he had proved adamant for the defense of the Law since the ouster of former dictator Ben Ali (who coincidentally died in Jeddah on September 19, 2019), had never held any position in politics, and was a frequent TV guest. As opposed to the politicians who usually express themselves in Tunisian vernacular, he was famous for speaking only classical Arabic on screen, uttering socially conservative and fiercely anti-Zionist views in a monotone. Even though the turnout was very low—less than 57 percent in the second round—it was striking that the youth countrywide had voted for Mr Saïd at over 90 percent, and that the hinterland had plebiscited that outsider at the expense of the traditional elite from the coastal cities. The social divide between the "two Tunisias" remained center stage, but for better or worse, social resentment translated into votes, and was channeled by the ballot box, instead of taking to the streets. At least, the democratic institutions created in 2011 still held, in spite of a decade of malfunction and the overall mediocrity and corruption of the political class. And as obstacles go, this regional and social class disparity is relatively manageable, compared to the much more worrisome situation in Egypt.

In the Valley of the Nile, too, a powerful reformist movement had sprung from missions in Europe by scholars like Sheikh Rifa'a al-Tahtawi, author of *The Gold of Paris*. Published in 1836, the book chronicled his voyage to France and the lessons he drew from it for regenerating the country of his birth. As we will see in the pages that follow, this process went off the rails under Nasserite populism beginning in 1952. Its pretend socialism dressed up the restoration of a military power structure inspired by the Mameluke dynasty. It would haunt the Egyptian uprising of 2011, and it would end in deadlock.

Egypt Between Muslim Brotherhood and Military Society

On February 11, 2011, General Omar Suleiman, vice president of the Republic and for two decades the head of military intelligence, announced that Hosni Mubarak was stepping down. He added that Mubarak's powers had passed to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. This bombshell news came after tens of thousands of young Egyptians had occupied Cairo's Tahrir Square for eighteen days. Here they had captured the attention of the world's television networks, especially Qatar-based Al Jazeera's satellite network. It broadcast live 24/7 directly from the events on the "Midan" (which literally translates as "square," though the word means "esplanade," like the National Mall in Washington or the Champ de Mars in Paris).

It was a primer on what a revolution in action looked like, brought to Arab living rooms from Casablanca to Basra, from Benghazi to Damascus, from Sana'a to Bahrain. It also broadcast to many of Europe's poverty-stricken banlieues peopled by Muslim immigrants and their offspring. Cairo, the timeworn capital of heroic Arabism of the Nasser era—muzzled by successive military regimes, swollen by the world's highest population growth rate, choked with smog, paralyzed by chaos, bureaucracy, and corruption—suddenly had a fresh vision. Once more, it had a starring role in fashionable media coverage that lasted from January 25 to February 11, 2011. During those eighteen days, all Arab eyes and those of many others around the world were riveted on Tahrir Square. The liberated acres of the Midan provided the stage for putting on a kind of egalitarian social utopia theater. All the evils afflicting Egyptian society would be dispelled here, and everyone would talk and reconcile and live happily ever after.

Earlier, Al Jazeera had televised the images of Ben Ali's fall, and in doing so had popularized the *digaj!* (from the French *dégage* - "get out!") of the young people from the poor quarters of Tunis. Once translated into Arabic (*Erhal!*) from the folksy French-Tunisian slang, it added one more element to the momentum building toward the Egyptian revolt. The exiling of the Carthaginian leader opened the prospect of overthrowing the irremovable Cairo pharaoh. But Al Jazeera was a vector for the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood backed by the Qatar emirate. Insidiously, it set about subliminally implanting in its viewers the idea of the Brothers as destined to lead Egypt and the Arab world of tomorrow.

With the young "revolutionaries" (*thawwar*) of Tahrir Square already marginalized by the end of 2011, Egypt, by then rid of Mubarak, found itself caught between the rock of the Muslim Brotherhood and the hard place of the military. The former won the parliamentary, then the presidential elections in June 2012 with their candidate Mohamed Morsi. They were driven out of office on July 3, 2013, after the Tamarod (literally: "rebellion") movement brought millions of their opponents into the streets, with the active support of the military. The army gradually reasserted its control during the year it had in effect let the Brotherhood do its thing while it used the time to prepare its comeback. Marshal el-Sisi replaced Morsi as head of state, taking his place in the continuum of top military brass represented by Colonel Nasser, Generals Sadat and Mubarak, and the Mameluke emirs before them.

In Tunisia, toppling Ben Ali had led to democracy, with all its flaws. In Egypt, after the utopian, chaotic interlude of the uprising, two opposing authoritarian regimes succeeded each other starting in the summer of 2012. The second, the military, prevailed and returned to power in July 2013 stronger than ever. The strength of the army's control over the state apparatus had structural causes that reached deeper than most observers—including the author of these lines—realized in midst of the euphoria of the uprising.

* * *

In December 2011, ten months into the upheaval, I had dinner in Cairo with the general said to be the "brains" on the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. My late friend the novelist Gamal al-Ghitani had introduced me to this rare opportunity to socialize with the military thinkers. As we dined in Heliopolis, a residential suburb of Cairo, in the headquarters mess of the super-elite Air Defense Forces, the general explained the Council's strategy to us.

In essence, it called for letting the Muslim Brotherhood win the elections, the presidential one included, to let them expose their sectarianism and incompetence for the whole country to see. The people, wised up by the disastrous experience, would quickly call on the army to take power back for good and rescue them. We listened politely to what he had to say. Meanwhile, an old-fashioned maître d' served us a dish in which shellfish

floated in a thick white sauce that seemed straight out of the 1950s, the bygone era of King Farouk. No doubt it was this dated recipe that brought home to me how out of touch our host's retrograde words sounded. The plugged-in intellectuals and impatient revolutionaries that I hung out with from dawn to dusk had definitely written off this obsolete, pathetic army around the time of Mubarak's fall. It was time for Egypt 2.0 and the joyful, fecund disorder of Midan Tahrir, where "it is forbidden to forbid"—resurrecting the key slogan of Paris 1968!

In the autumn of 2012, when I reread the overlong manuscript for *The Arab Passion* [*Passion Arabe*], my travel diary of the Arab Spring, I edited out the account of the Heliopolis evening. Our host's prediction now struck me as anecdotal and hardly worth including. Despite thirty years of familiarity with life on the banks of the Nile, I had been taken in by the ambient enthusiasm. I had failed to foresee that the Heliopolis prediction uttered by the general at the dinner table in December 2011 would come true with a vengeance a year and a half later—and in effect bring the uniformed men back to iron-clad power.

The Tahrir Square Protest

The protest on Tahrir Square was an uninterrupted show put on by some tens of thousands of educated young people for the most part. It was broadcast on television, which made the movers of the uprising seem larger than life, and also suddenly gave them access to globalized elites whose language and memes they shared. But this would not have allowed them to join with either the poor youth, overrepresented in a country with eighty million inhabitants in 2011 (with another twenty million new arrivals eight years later), or the middle class writ large.

For eighteen fateful days, between January 25 and February 11 2011, there were numerous angry eruptions in other Egyptian towns, from Alexandria to Aswan, during which the demonstrators torched local offices of Mubarak's NDP (National Democratic Party) and police stations. However, these sporadic outbursts of popular fury were not enough to stoke an insurrection that would irrevocably end in revolution. The uprising went around in circles on the Tahrir esplanade, both literally and figuratively, all actions captured by TV camera lenses mounted on the balconies of the surrounding

apartment buildings. The pressure on Mubarak reached the point where the general staff sidelined him. High-ranking officers now had the chance to rid themselves of the increasingly dysfunctional oldster obsessed with the project of founding a hereditary monarchy. Afterward, the rebellion marked time. It did not succeed in energetically penetrating the immense human territory of a country suffocating under galloping population growth. It would finally sweep aside the Muslim Brotherhood wave that, in the end, broke on a wall of bayonets.

Tunisia's small size (eleven million people), relative remoteness from the Middle East, nearness to Europe, strong middle class and weak army turned it into a revolutionary laboratory. But whatever happened there would not imperil the entire region's stability, or its insertion into the global system. By contrast, the enormity of Egypt's being caught up in an insurrectional dynamic could only mean major, instant repercussions that would rock its environment. The tremors potentially ran from the security of the oil monarchies on the other side of the Red Sea, to the delicate equilibrium of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that adjoined the Sinai through the Negev, and especially the Gaza Strip, controlled since 2007 by Hamas.

True, the Egypt of 2011 had lost its former Nasserian aura. It could no longer boast of having the region's best-educated elites, media that controlled information and entertainment of the Arab world as they had done after the Middle East had freed itself from European colonial domination. The Egyptian educational system foundered when it opened to take in the impoverished masses, and the once famous Cairo radio station "Voice of the Arabs" was now replaced by satellite networks broadcasting from Dubai and Doha. The redistribution of oil and gas revenues coming from the Gulf was the source of all of the Middle East's wealth. Egypt, the Arab giant of yesteryear had grown obese, nearsighted, and arthritic. But if it collapsed, it would still destabilize the entire neighborhood. Simply by tilting to one side or the other in the fight for hegemony, the overpopulated Nile Valley would upset the regional balance of power.

The Muslim Brotherhood took power at the ballot box in Cairo on June 30, 2012 with Qatar's support. Soon, financial aid for the Morsi presidency followed to the tune of three billion dollars. Doha's rivals from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait resented it all as an unacceptable provocation. They put their riches behind eliminating the "brotherist" regime and abetting the army's takeover in 2013, raising the stakes with

twelve billion U.S. dollars in subsidies for Marshal el-Sisi. Now would have been the proper time for letting the wind of freedom that swept through Tahrir Square in January–February 2011 blow—but after three years, there was only a slight stirring in the air. It was like the *nessim*, that springtime breeze the Egyptians celebrate every year to mark the Nile Valley's unchangeable permanence since pharaonic times.

Hosni Mubarak's seemingly never-ending reign was strengthened by the United States of George W. Bush in the aftermath of 9/11. Egypt's ruler was flush with the politico-military victory over the Egyptian jihadists that had been stepping up their attacks between 1992 and 1997. Mubarak seemed like an effective rampart against bin Laden and his imitators. Numerous "enemy combatants" captured in the Afghan-Pakistan theater by American forces were turned over to the Egyptian security services headed by General Suleiman. They were interrogated under the "extraordinary rendition" program, over the protests of humanitarian organizations who were against using torture to extract confessions.

Just as Syria's Hafez al-Assad had promoted his son Bashar to be his successor in 2000, like Gaddafi had wanted to set the stage for his son Saif al-Islam, Mubarak had also started to pave the way for his offspring Gamal to succeed him. Lacking his own ties to the army, Gamal was instead close to business circles, major corporations with international connections. They soaked up all bank credits, to the detriment of SMEs, and enjoyed multiple income streams, from tariff barriers to various subsidies. The growth of a class of very wealthy individuals fed feelings of injustice and resentment toward the Mubarak family. They were stigmatized in popular usage as "the 1 percent" because of their acquaintance with the president's son, as depicted in *The Nile Hilton Incident*, a film by Tarik Saleh (screened in 2017).

However, Egypt's drift into monarchy, mocked by the Egyptian pundit Saad Eddin Ibrahim as being a "monarpublic" (*gumlukiyya*), flew in the face of the succession system the general staff back in Nasser's day had put in place. It revived the tradition of the Mamelukes, a non-hereditary dynasty that had governed that country from the thirteenth century to the start of the modern era, which coincided with Bonaparte's Nile expedition in 1799. The Mameluke military chiefs delegated supreme command to one of their number, and if that emir had a son he would be eliminated, if necessary, when the father died. That way, power returned

to the select body set up to designate the next leader according to the rules and internal balances. Hence, Nasser's or Sadat's children no longer played a political role. The precedent Mubarak was trying to create for his own son lost him the support of his generals. They responded by reactivating the "Supreme Council of the Armed Forces," an authority, very much in the Mameluke tradition, that evicted the president from office, closing the eighteen days of Tahrir Square protest on February 11, 2011.

The origins of these days of unrest were social, denominational, and human rights-oriented. As was also the case for the other uprisings in the region, the economic climate at the turn of the decade was marked by rising world prices of grains and hydrocarbons. It made the average shopping basket more expensive, especially since rapidly growing Egypt (the population nearly doubled during Mubarak's thirty-year rule) was the largest importer of wheat on the planet. In a country where one in five people lived on less than two U.S. dollars per day, a high birth rate is perceived as ensuring intergenerational solidarity. Islamic proselytizing moreover encourages unbridled reproduction, seeing in it the promise of armies of jihadist soldiers that would swamp the world. To make a bad situation worse, the government-mandated family planning program was one of the first casualties of the 2011 uprising. Since then, Egypt's population growth has shot up again, like it did in Tunisia, but with absolute numbers eight times higher.

In 2011, half of Egypt's population was under the age of twenty-five. Among holders of high school degrees, representing nearly a third of their age cohort, 50 percent of men and 80 percent of women were unemployed. Hiring by the government sector had bloated the unproductive bureaucracy and stifled all initiative—providing fodder for innumerable jokes (*nukat*). But government jobs, too, had been cut drastically by the structural adjustment policies insisted on by the IMF. During the era of Nasserite socialism, practically anyone with a degree could have a career in government. On the eve of the uprising in January 2011, the public sector furnished only about 20 percent of total jobs in the economy, and at significantly lower salaries. The outlook for jobs commensurate with qualifications was made all the more dire because educational standards collapsed under the impact of mass education. It created a tidal wave of "relative deprivation" that sociologists regard as one of the factors motivating educated youth to join revolutionary movements, as observed in the Tunisian case.

Among other consequences of the mediocre quality of degrees was that Arabian Peninsula states now balked at employing Egyptians. With many emigrants hence returning home, the flow of remittances from abroad also diminished. Ultimately, it was international aid that underpinned the country's survival. Sadat had made obtaining it the bedrock of his policy, negotiating American civilian and military aid worth 1.7 billion dollars annually in 2010. This was his reward for signing the peace treaty with Israel, in force since 1979. However, the continual worsening of Egypt's demographic and economic situations led to a growing dependence on the IMF (whose demands for reform triggered hunger riots), the European Union, and, increasingly, on the Gulf oil kingdoms. The latter then used this decisive political leverage to influence Egypt's emergence from its revolutionary phase, as shown first by Qatar's support for the Muslim Brotherhood, and then by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates throwing in their support with the military.

In such a stressed environment, the military top brass was seen to be the keeper of order in the decades before the uprising. For the country's major partners, this was the lesser evil compared to the risk of Egypt imploding and destabilizing the entire Middle East. But this perpetually repeated security plug-in only worsened the economic, social, and cultural decline, while also eroding public freedoms. On this highly flammable fabric, the revolutionary spark seems to have been ignited by three types of fuses.

For the leftist militants denouncing capitalism and worker exploitation, the cause of the conflagration lay in the great strike on April 6, 2008 at the Mahalla al-Kobra textile mill, located 100 miles from Cairo in the Nile Delta. The 20,000 workers out on strike, would exemplify the emergence of new labor struggles. Awareness of these events would henceforth spread in the digital world, their power of example multiplied via social networks. Such a fusion of the real and virtual worlds was embodied by the "April 6 Youth Movement" formed to support the strike. Its principal activists would later be trained in the Balkans by NGOs close to the billionaire philanthropist George Soros, who had previously contributed to the fall of local authoritarian regimes.

Using social networks, the militants of "April 6" were the first to call for the January 25 demonstrations on Tahrir Square. They popularized the "Revolution 2.0," phrase, which was then widely picked up by the media as a catchword for the Arab Spring. But the Egyptian workers' movement, despite

recurring walkouts over very low salaries or failure to pay bonuses, was only a secondary factor. The formal private sector supplied just 10–15 percent of jobs. The vast majority of the poor—about 70 percent of the population—survived by dealing in the informal, or "gray" economy, while the more lucky depended on tourism windfall. However, all were affected negatively in real time by economic disturbances. The drop in foreign tourism after January 25, 2011 and the stagnation of investments translated immediately into a lower standard of living for a great number of Egyptians subsisting from day to day. They blamed it on the spectacle televised from Tahrir Square and its depressive effects on economic activity.

The catalyst for the uprising, however, would not be the workers' movement's rise in power after all, but the fatal police beating of 28-year-old pharmacist Khaled Said. Arrested in an Alexandria cybercafé for unclear reasons, this young, elegant, middle-class man had studied in the West. Images of his bruised body and broken bones went viral on the Internet. The episode was seen as par for the course where the explosive violence the police forces were allowed to mete out was concerned. In contrast to Bouazizi, who had burned himself alive at Sidi Bouzid, Said did not come from a disinherited background and was no social symbol—factors on which the class alliance against Ben Ali had been built in Tunisia. The young pharmacist personified a brutal attack on universal human rights.

But eight months went by between his murder on June 6, 2010 and the fall of Mubarak on February 11, 2011, where only three weeks had elapsed between Bouazizi's fatal gesture and Ben Ali's exile from Tunis. The mobilization, in effect, was mediated by Facebook's sales manager for the Middle East Wael Ghonim, a thirty-year-old, upper-middle-class Egyptian based in Dubai. He put up a page, "We Are All Khaled Said (*Kollona Khalid Saʿid*)," and in so doing he devised an international virtual network whose "friends" assembled behind their screens rather than in real-world protests in the street. In Tunis, the poor youth of the disenfranchised neighborhoods had joined with the urban elites in a single movement against the dictatorship, thus priming the virtuous democratic process that Egypt lacked. "We Are All Khaled Said" became the main slogan on Tahrir Square; but it supported a demand for human dignity in the face of torture, and not a dynamic of political mobilization. As for Wael Ghonim, he would later back the Muslim Brotherhood candidate, Mohamed Morsi, in June 2012.

In a final curtain-raiser to the eighteen-day uprising in January–February 2011, the political and denominational malaise of a regime on its last legs manifested itself in two different but equally disastrous events: the parliamentary elections in November–December 2010 and the New Year's Day massacre in a Coptic church in Alexandria.

The Muslim Brotherhood winning eighty-eight out of 518 seats in the parliamentary elections of 2005 had indicated to the West, led then by George W. Bush in the White House, that the Islamist opposition represented an organized threat. In a post-9/11 context, this had reinforced the West's determination to help Mubarak contain it. In December 2010, by contrast, the ruling National Democratic Party wound up with nearly all of the MPs, following an election marked by blatant stuffing of the ballot boxes and voter intimidation. This combined with a very low 23 percent participation rate that locked the institutional political framework: either Mubarak would stay in office and be re-elected president in the autumn of 2011 or he would be succeeded by his son Gamal.

The military hierarchy hated the latter prospect and harbored reservations about the former in view of the 82-year-old ruler's advanced age. The upshot was that the street would meet with sympathy if it called for an end to Mubarak's presidential obstinacy. Washington also signaled its disappointment. President Barack Obama, who had controversially chosen a hijab-wearing Egyptian American as an advisor, was trying to set U.S. relations with Islam on a new course after his predecessor's "War on Terror." He simultaneously advocated for democratization and for "engaging" the Muslim Brotherhood, who were seen as exemplifying a pious modernity, of which Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Turkey embodied in those days the highest expression.

Such was the overall political deadlock when the slaughter at the Coptic church of the Two Saints, in the deprived Sidi Bishr district of Alexandria, took place during a midnight mass on January 1. The Copts had previously been the target of many dust-ups instigated by very powerful local Salafist groups that condemned all Christians as infidels. This latest massacre resulted in twenty-three deaths. After initially blaming a Palestinian group linked to al-Qaeda, the police arrested a Salafist in the neighborhood, Sayyid Bilal. He died under torture, so his guilt was never affirmed. His spiritual kin turned him into a bearded martyr whose face they superimposed on that of Khaled Said in works of propaganda. Some of them later joined the

revolutionary goings-on in Tahrir Square in the hope of taking over its leadership.

The families of the slain Copts, meanwhile, rejected Mubarak's offer of condolences. To the Christian community as a whole, the regime had proved itself at best incapable of defending it against the Islamists' atrocities, and at worst indifferent to them. Some went so far as to suspect intelligence services of having staged a "false flag" operation, that is, of having instigated the attack before "disappearing" its perpetrator. In any event, the inquiry produced no explanations. But it did succeed in alienating the Coptic population from the ruling power, and young Copts would be a highly visible presence on Tahrir Square.

This bundle of discontents was tinder for an uprising, especially since Mubarak was no longer regarded as master of the game. He was isolated in the General Staff for his dynastic ambitions and badly regarded inside Washington's Beltway, where as recently as January 14, Ben Ali's fall had been applauded as heralding a democratizing of the Arab world. The final catalyst was the call by the "April 6 Youth Movement" for a demonstration on January 25. Ironically, it was a holiday on which the police celebrated their own uprising against the British in 1952, a decisive event in Egypt's independence. The regime had then repurposed the uprising's significance to glorify its own repressive apparatus.

However, the leftist movement's call for the third year in a row to subvert such a symbol and rediscover its original inspiration now lit the match that would set the country on fire. Opposing groups succeeded in entering Tahrir Square by side streets discreetly left open by the military while police antiriot squads blocked the great avenues leading into it. The authority of the security forces was stymied the entire day by 15,000 demonstrators. The same happened the following evening. Clashes with the police mushroomed, but the army did not intervene. Not, that is, until the ruling National Democratic Party's headquarters building facing the Egyptian Museum on the Midan was torched two days later. That is when the tanks rolled in. But they had been deployed more to check the museum would not burn and contain the situation than to end it. On January 28, the Muslim Brotherhood called on their followers to come to the square. With that, the mobilization's size changed, passing a threshold of 100,000 people.

In making this decision, the Brothers broke with more than half a century of caution, a legacy of the ferocious Nasserite repression of 1954 that saw

several of their leaders mount the scaffold and most of their cadres put behind bars. That cut the head off the organization until Sadat allowed it to be resurrected in a controlled fashion during the 1970s to fight campus leftists. Since that era, the Brotherhood had enjoyed a state of tolerance: it was not allowed to compete with the military in the political domain but was encouraged to use its influence to provide social services in lieu of the state. It ran a welfare network (*khayri*) of clinics, kindergartens, summer camps, trade unions, businesses, banks, and credit unions, all conforming to sharia. And, of course, scattered all over the country were mosques and cultural and religious centers with the Brotherhood behind them.

In line with the liberal message that the ruling powers wanted to communicate to the outside world, the Muslim Brotherhood would from time to time be allowed to stand for election and send representatives to Parliament—as they did in 2005. But they had little legislative clout in the face of the all-powerful executive. And if they crossed any red lines, their leaders made round trips to prison. With their members organized in a strict hierarchy, carefully indoctrinated, and selected for their potential to reach positions of responsibility in the *tanzim* (organization), the Brotherhood co-managed Egypt in effect as the army's junior partner. All the while. they spread their tentacles, biding their time for the day when they would replace it.

The Muslim Brothers on the Offensive

What went into their decision to go all in on January 28 is not known. For one thing, the move was deliberated upon in secret. For another, as it would turn out, their reentering politics in this way, to eventually challenge the army, had catastrophic consequences. In July 2013, the military top brass finally came down on them even more violently than during the Nasserite repression that had destroyed it in 1954. In the meanwhile, between the spring of 2011 and the summer of 2013, the Brotherhood had taken turns with the military using popular mobilization against each other. First, the Brothers had co-opted part of the uprising's legacy by voting for their candidate Mohamed Morsi in the Presidential election of June 2012. Next, the army secretly went along with the demonstrations organized against President Morsi by the Tammarod ("rebellion")

Movement in the spring of 2013, also in the name of flouted revolutionary ideals. So it went until Marshal el-Sisi seized power definitively on July 3, before being elected president on May 26, 2014 with over 96 percent of the vote—a tally worthy of the *ancien régime*.

In that process, the first open show of force by the Brotherhood to capture the insurrectional momentum on Tahrir Square took place February 18, 2011 during the Friday prayers that followed Mubarak's fall. Everyone occupying the Midan was lined up facing Mecca, transforming the square into a vast, open-air mosque. The sermon was delivered by Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the Egyptian-born major international figure in the Brotherhood who had been naturalized as Qatari and became Al Jazeera's chief television preacher. He had flown in from Doha just for the event. This celebrity sermon was to showcase the successful ending of three weeks of practically uninterrupted coverage of the Tahrir Square demonstrations by Qatari sponsored satellite TV channel.

Qatar's strategy, in step with the United States, whose president had urged Mubarak to resign on February 4, was to rely on the Brotherhood to hijack the Arab upheavals wherever they occurred—and to promote the pious middle classes as the region's leaders. This was the fantastically wealthy but underpopulated, gas-rich emirate's chance to manage populous stand-ins that let it hold its own against its powerful Saudi neighbor. The Saudis, of course, regarded the Brotherhood as their major rival in the quest for hegemony over Arab Sunnism, and the upheavals as threatening.

In June 2011, this process of taking power went into setting up ad hoc Islamist political parties to stand for election during the transition period. The main two were the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) (*hizb al-horeyya wal ʿadala*) of the Brotherhood and the Party of the Light (*hizb an nour*) of the Salafist Call movement (*daʿwa salafiyya*). Meanwhile, multiple utopian revolutionary groups that wanted to keep squatting Tahrir Square (it would be ritually occupied every Friday for a year) battled with the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces to keep the agitation, or "street politics," going. It would ultimately peter out, but not before confrontations degenerated into more casualties.

For their part, the Islamists invaded the electoral field after mobilizing their troops in the street: on July 29, 2011, a monster demonstration—the biggest since the January uprising—saw a million people gather on the Midan. For the most part they were duly-bearded Salafists who had come

from all over the country in buses chartered for the occasion. They clamored for Egypt to become an Islamic state, proclaiming the superiority of divine sharia over any constitution, and they demanded that Mubarak be tried. They agitated for carrying out purges with greater vigor, and they pressured the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, which seemed to be dragging its feet. They made sure to segregate men from women on the square that had previously symbolized liberal utopia, and they chased out the secular militants who had been camping there since July 8.

Between Mubarak's fall on February 11, 2011 and Mohamed Morsi assuming office on June 30, 2012, seven elections were held: three referendums and two ballots each for the parliamentary and presidential elections. The Tahrir revolutionaries were incapable of participating as such, and only managed to field a few small groupings whose vote tallies were negligible. The old, discredited regime failed to rebuild a successor to Mubarak's NDP, dissolved in April 2011, to contest the legislative elections between late 2011 and early 2012. The Brothers' Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) and the Salafists' Nour parties won in a landslide with 73 percent of the seats, amplified by the voting method. And yet, on the second ballot of the presidential election in June 2012, General Ahmed Shafik, the army's candidate and Mubarak's last prime minister, had a vote total of 48.27 percent to Morsi's 51.73 percent.

As Hala Bayumi, Bernard Rougier, and Clément Steuer showed in their contributions to *Egypt's Revolutions* (published in 2015), voter behavior during this period organized along two fault lines: Islamists versus secularists, and revolutionaries versus counterrevolutionaries. In the legislative elections, the revolutionary-counterrevolutionary dynamic was missing, and the religious parties easily beat their secular competitors. They succeeded in capturing the vision of the uprising by tying it to a readiness for change, but they organized it around a sharpening of Muslim identity as sole guarantor for restoring order from chaos by any means.

The atmosphere of the uprising became less and less joyous as economic and social problems gradually worsened, which Al Jazeera unflinchingly showcased daily. On the first ballot of the presidential election, the field was wide open: General Shafik was hard on Morsi's heels, with each getting just under a quarter of the votes. Three other candidates split the rest: the Nasserite Hamdeen Sabahi, with a fifth of the votes, received support from Egyptians faithful to the revolution but hostile to the army and Islamism.

The ex-Muslim Brotherhood dissident and liberal Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh (17 percent) assembled a motley coalition of Salafists and Islamic leftists trying to drape themselves in the spirit of Tahrir. Finally, Mubarak's former minister, Amr Moussa, with 11 percent, would concede to General Shafik the secularized middle class, which was still more afraid of the beards than they were disillusioned by the military. Morsi won the second round of ballots not only due to a massive crossover vote from Aboul Fotouh, but also because Sabahi's non-Islamist voters went over to him. They hoped he would safeguard at least part of the revolution's gains against the prospect of the army taking over again.

The Army Returns, the Salafists Deploy

President Morsi's base was therefore quite narrow on the day of his accession on June 30, 2012, and he wasted no time in reducing it further. By undertaking to "brotherize the state," he drastically alienated the supporters that had switched from Aboul Fotouh and Sabahi in the hopes that Morsi would safeguard the revolution. A geographic analysis of the election also showed that the vote in the cities—where the demonstrations had taken place—went much less for Morsi than the rural vote, especially in Upper Egypt, did.

An anti-authoritarian uprising was not long in coming. It broke out in autumn of 2012 in the streets of Cairo, unspooling from the demonstrations in Tahrir Square. Ironically, the Brotherhood militias took on the repressive crowd control function that had previously belonged to Mubarak's now largely demobilized police. Concurrently, the courts kept striking down decisions made by the new administration. The Tammarod ("rebellion") collective began in April 2013, supported by the groups that had issued the call to go into the streets on January 25, 2011, among them the April 6 Youth Movement. Spokespeople dedicated to the workers' cause were appalled at how the government was aligning itself with Islamist capitalist interests, such as billionaires Khairat al-Shater and Hassan Malek, both leading figures in the Brotherhood and role models for the successful pious entrepreneurs.

The military top brass, staying behind the scenes to avoid spooking the "revolutionaries," backed Tammarod when it organized a gigantic

demonstration on June 30, 2013, the first anniversary of Morsi's election. The helicopters clattering overhead signaled the army's approval. On July 3, the president was dismissed by Minister of Defense Marshal el-Sisi, the new strongman. He delivered a statement to that effect with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, the Coptic patriarch, the head of the Salafist Nour party, and various liberal politicians next to him. The Muslim Brotherhood was mercilessly repressed: the two sit-in protests it attempted to hold on Cairo squares to revive the Tahrir spirit were dispersed by force, resulting in what is known as the Rabaa square massacre. The official death toll on August 14 was over 630—it was four times that number according to the Muslim Brotherhood, and independent newspapers reported it at 1,400. Human Rights Watch stated that 40,000 people accused of membership in the Muslim Brotherhood would be imprisoned in Egypt—among them Morsi, who was sentenced to death, and all the cadres who had not managed to flee the country.

The Egyptian paradox is that the ex-revolutionaries would have lent a hand in returning the army to power if only to confront Islamist authoritarianism. That did not prevent many from dissociating themselves later from Marshal el-Sisi and winding up in prison. Tahrir Square had not only failed to kindle a democratic process, but three years later had ultimately given the military greater control, which then led to a restart of jihadist violence. This paradox raises several fundamental questions about the nature of politics in the Arab world. In Egypt, in contrast to Tunisia, there was no strong enough autonomous middle class to allow for the election of a constituent assembly shared between secularists and Islamists by proportional representation. The Tahrir revolutionaries did not know how to connect with the impoverished youth who never set foot on the Square, so as to forge an alliance that could control Mubarak's ouster and stabilize the transition into institutional politics. The military removed the president in both countries, but while general Omar Suleiman announced that Mubarak was stepping down to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, there was no such military body in Tunisia to seize power. As for the Ennahda Islamists, they could not put on public prayers—nor had there been any in Tunis—the Friday after Ben Ali fled, whereas Sheikh al-Qaradawi made a spectacular political show of leading them on Tahrir Square after Mubarak's resignation.

But the vise grip in which the Brothers and the generals had Egyptian society, which prevented the revolutionaries from moving on to erect

democratic institutions, itself raises a question. One of the answers to why the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings had different outcomes lies in the demographic explosion on the banks of the Nile. Because of it, the majority of the population of a country with scarce resources—tourism, the Suez Canal, emigrant remittances, a bit of oil—had been put in an immensely precarious state. The entrepreneurial middle class had too little clout to become politically independent, so the power remained in the hands of hierarchized, hidden castes.

The ruling power's ace card then was maintaining order by hemming in the masses coercively or through religious regimentation—that is, as played by the military on the one hand and the Muslim Brotherhood on the other. Beyond that, the lack of economic viability had Egypt depending totally on foreign aid, whose donors valued stability above all. The IMF's push for structural reforms, however, quickly ran into limits when hunger riots broke out. The oil monarchies only funneled credits to the faction that would serve their respective agendas for regional hegemony; Qatar sustained the Muslim Brotherhood, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates the military. These insurmountable structural deficiencies stymied any democratic process in Egypt after 2011.

Suppression of the Brotherhood, listed as a terrorist group by the el-Sisi regime, eliminated the one entity that might have challenged the army. However, it did nothing to impede either the growth of the Salafist movement or the resurgence of jihadist violence—quite the contrary. The head of the Nour party had, in fact, pledged allegiance to el-Sisi on the occasion of the military's July 3, 2013 coup deposing Mohamed Morsi. The Salafists, then, so long as they did not criticize the authorities, were free to spread their version of Islam.

In a country where their Shiite nemesis is practically absent (even though both Cairo and Al-Azhar University were founded in the tenth century by the Shiite Fatimid dynasty), the Salafists made the Copt community their target of choice, regularly cursing them as infidels. In the meanwhile, they offered a vast network of places of prayer in the informal settlements that helped maintain social ties, advocated submission to the authorities, and thwarted attempts by the Muslim Brotherhood to restart social networking through their charities. As they provided charities that replaced the now-destroyed Brothers networks, and in doing so decisively helped the military to rule over the poorer areas, they had—as a quid pro quo—a free hand to

renew attacks on churches, as well as assaults on the Christians and their proprety. The American NGO Coptic Solidarity denounced the el-Sisi administration in May 2017 as such:

> Egypt is increasingly becoming an "ecosystem" conducive to Jihadist violence. [President el-Sisi] allows the Salafists and other Islamists to dominate the public sphere, spreading their hate speech via state-owned media and educational curricula. Publicly labeling Christians as "infidels" and "kuffars" amounts to a license to persecute and kill them.

Several dozen churches were destroyed by mobs treating the Copts as scapegoats for Morsi's dismissal, as the Coptic Patriarch Tawadros had been present at the scene of the July 3, 2013 coup. Over the next few years, intersectarian incidents multiplied, with the violence peaking for one six-month period, from December 2016 through May 2017. A hundred Copts were massacred in attacks claimed by ISIS that happened during mass, on pilgrimages, or on Christian holy days such as Palm Sunday or Ascension Day.

Wiping out Christian celebrations and places of worship in the Land of Islam being bedrock Salafist doctrine, the jihadists implemented it simultaneously—beyond Egypt, throughout the territories they controlled in Syria and Iraq, and against the Copts in Libya. Starting in February 2015, ISIS disseminated a video showing twenty-one immigrant Copt workers having their throats cut on a Mediterranean beach. They called it a message from "the south of Rome" to "the nation of the Cross," and a promise to fill "with Christian blood" the ocean into which the West had "thrown the body of Sheikh Osama bin Laden."

But it was in the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt that the explosion of jihadist violence reached its high point, thus fitting the country into the regional environment shattered by the Arab uprisings. Sinai had been conquered by Israel during the June 1967 war. While it was finally returned to Egypt in 1982, its population was held in suspicion and contempt by the security services dispatched there from the Nile Valley. During the Israeli occupation, young Bedouins had forged ties with activists of Hamas and Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip. They set up networks that drew closer to al-Qaeda. Beginning in 2010, these networks attacked the Jewish state with missiles while sabotaging the Egypt-Israel gas pipeline, which attracted severe government repression.

With the 2011 uprising, when Sinai tribes camped on Tahrir Square, anti-Israeli sentiment merged with rage against the Egyptian police, who had been accused of abuse and torture in Sinai on a vast scale. The result: police stations were destroyed by heavy weapons fire, likely from contraband that come over the border from Libya. After the fall of Gaddafi, there had followed looting of his immense arsenals, parts of which were captured by the Sinai jihadist group Ansar Bait al-Maqdis ("Supporters of the Holy Sanctuary [Jerusalem]"). The name alluded to the jihadist group's original anti-Zionist orientation, which would make itself felt during the spring of 2011.

After Morsi's overthrow, Sinai Jihadists redirected their activities against the Egyptian state, which they had declared apostate along with all its agents. Ansar Bait al-Maqdis multiplied its murderous attacks against police, soldiers, and judges in the Sinai as well as in the Nile Valley. In November 2014, it pledged allegiance to the ISIS "caliphate" of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, calling itself from then on, "Sinai *wilaya* [province] of the Islamic State." Under this name, it took credit for the attack on a plane filled with Russian tourists as it took off from Sharm El-Sheikh on October 31, 2015, resulting in 222 deaths. This attack coincided with Moscow's troops intervening in Syria, where they had just moved into the Hmeimim base on September 30. On November 24, 2017, a massacre at the Rawdha mosque in Bir al-ʿAbed during Friday prayers killed over 300 of the faithful. A place of Sufi worship, the mosque had been cursed by name in the previous issue of the ISIS English-language magazine *Dabiq*. The attack was justified on two grounds: because the Salafists consider Sufism, which venerates saints, to be a heresy, its practitioners could be killed freely; furthermore, they accused the dominant local tribe of collaboration with the security services.

Jihadism's cumulative body count in Egypt between July 2013 and the Rawda mosque massacre in November 2017 cannot be pegged accurately, but is comparable to that of the government suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood following Mohamed Morsi's ousting. Eight years later, the joyful memories of the eighteen days from from January 25, when Tahrir Square was first occupied, to Mubarak's fall on February 11, 2011, seem to belong to a different era. The face-off between army and jihad closed the democratic parenthesis and invited questions as to whether democracy is even possible in a number of Arab countries.

For the record, I had coffee in Esnah, a town in Upper Egypt, on April 15, 2011, when the revolutionary euphoria was still at its height. For the first

and, in retrospect, only time in nearly four decades of frequenting the banks of the Nile as a foreigner, I was free to wander about. Gone was the police presence that used to strictly prohibit straying outside predetermined itineraries (this was before the ISIS-led terror wave would transform the area into an off-limits zone where everyone was a potential hostage subject to beheading). In passing, I heard on the coffee house radio that a Copt general had been appointed head of the nearby Minya governorate—an unexpected step. A local Islamist protest forced the nomination to be withdrawn within a few days. Meanwhile, from the mountains of Afghanistan, Ayman al-Zawahiri, the al-Qaeda leader, reminded his native country that it was necessary for "Islam to dominate Egypt and not to be dominated there."

Libya Disintegrates: From Rogue State to Tribal-Jihadist Lawlessness

The third despot to fall during the Arab uprisings, Muammar Gaddafi, met the most violent fate—a fitting end to his extraordinarily brutal, demented reign. He was lynched while hiding in the city of Sirte, where he had taken refuge after a NATO warplane had bombed his escape convoy. Having governed in an extreme mode during his forty-two-year regime that gave rise to the term "rogue state," he bequeathed its curse on Libya. The country went through an erratic uprising in which Western military powers led by France and the United Kingdom intervened alongside the Arab Gulf states.

On the way to becoming a failed state after its fruitless elections in the summer of 2012, Libya ended up with two contending governments, one based in Cyrenaica and the other in Tripolitania. These regional entities, each born of a long history, regained their autonomy after being unified during the dictatorship. Yet even their self-proclaimed leaders did not completely dominate their territories, split up as they were among multiple militia fiefdoms that in part reflected ancient tribal divisions. From then on, local and international jihadist networks entered the fight to control Libya's oil fields and infrastructure, as well as human trafficking. Meanwhile, money showered on the actors from rival Arab oil monarchies seeking clientele.

As with Libya's neighbors, Tunisia and Egypt, the process of eliminating Gaddafi took shape around a demand for respecting human rights. The Libyan uprising thus emulated the demonstrations in Tunis and Cairo, which Libyans followed avidly on the Al Jazeera network. Tripolitania

is culturally close to North Africa; it belongs to the world of couscous, of which Sirte forms the eastern limit, and its dialect mixed with Berber is Maghrebian. Before the uprising, workers immigrated there from the neglected regions of south and east Tunisia, sending home valuable remittances. The area had been colonized by ancient Rome, as witnessed by the ruins at Leptis Magna and Sabratha with their bilingual Latin and Punic inscriptions.

A stark contrast, Cyrenaica (*Barsa* in Arabic—or *Jebel Akhdar* ["green mountain"]) is located only 211 miles from Crete. Ancient Greece set up trading posts here at Cyrene and Ptolemais, where the road from Memphis in the Nile valley via Siwa and the western oases ended. The region, which came under Lagid domination in antiquity, falls within the zone of Egyptian influence. Before Gaddafi's fall, its population included up to 1.5 million immigrants from the neighboring country. The dialect resembles ones spoken from Alexandria to Aswan, and rice is a staple of the diet. In the twentieth century, Italian colonization brought diverse culinary traditions, such as the rustic pastas with spicy sauces called *makruna*. These were brought over by peasants from Puglia and Calabria, who settled on these arid lands only to be decimated by disease and Bedouin raids.

This grassroots culinary unification was one of the birth certificates of modern Libya, which formed specifically around evicting the occupier. Italy's political, cultural, and linguistic penetration remained skin-deep during its 32-year occupation (1911–1943). The colonial period was marked mainly by abuses, followed by repeated Libyan revolts against the infidels under the banner of jihad. The most famous was that led by Omar al-Mukhtar, hanged by the Mussolini regime in 1931. Al-Mukhtar became a major symbol of an identity at once Libyan and pan-Islamic, but ultimately was not enough of a unifying figure to permit overcoming the hardy regional antagonisms. These resurfaced immediately with the "Libyan Spring," which from the start progressed differently in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania. In the Saharan province of Fezzan in the south, formerly administered by France, separatism emerged among the tribes. This would facilitate the immense migration from Africa to Europe through Libya following Gaddafi's demise.

Starting on February 15, 2011, one month after Ben Ali fled and four days after Mubarak quit, riots erupted in Benghazi, the Cyrenian metropolis, following the arrest of a human rights activist. Protesters occupied the city's main square, rebaptizing it "Tahrir Square," which everyone knew

either from having been to the original in Cairo or watching the Egyptian upheaval on Al Jazeera.

The lead figures of the Benghazi demonstrations were the mothers, sisters, and widows of the mass killings at Abu Salim, a prison where Ghaddafi had had 1,200 suspected jihadists executed on June 29, 1996. Fifteen years later, the women still demanded justice. In the ensuing days, contingents of deserting soldiers helped the revolt occupy the ruling power's local centers, and on February 25 they liberated Cyrenaica from Gaddafi's clutches after fighting that cost a thousand lives. Meanwhile, Tripolitania remained under regime control following a violent crackdown that choked off the unrest in the capital.

Libya found itself cut in two—unlike the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt that brought their nations together, and where the dictators were helpless to kill the insurrection because they lacked the support of their armed forces. In March 2011, Gaddafi sent a column of tanks to attack Benghazi—they would have to cover more than 500 miles along the coastal highway. In Tripolitania, the regime had crushed the demonstrations, especially in the town of Zawiya, west of the capital. Then it laid siege to Misrata, whose large port with its free-trade zone supplied the whole country with imported products and where a commercial middle class had developed.

On March 5, a National Council of Transition that had been formed on February 27 in Benghazi declared itself the sole representative of Libya. The Western countries recognized it five days later. On March 17, the UN Security Council authorized protective measures for the Libyan people, while Gaddafi's armored column battered the rebel defenses. Al Jazeera televised the crowd on Benghazi's newly minted Tahrir Square as they waved French and British flags and the banner of King Idris, deposed by Gaddafi on September 1, 1969. On March 19, the tanks, their dust clouds already visible from the city, were destroyed by Franco-British air strikes supported by the Americans "leading from behind," as President Obama put it.

The West Strikes, a Nation Disintegrates

Whatever else may be said about it, the intervention by the West under UN and NATO auspices played a decisive role in Gaddafi's fall. Besides saving the Cyrenian city in extremis from a bloodbath, it broke the siege

of Misrata by destroying Gaddafi's tanks that were pounding the port city. Finally, on October 20, Western forces intercepted the fleeing dictator's convoy, leading to his death by lynching. The intervention was internationally praised at the time for moral and political reasons; the liberal West could not possibly stand idly by while a madman dictator massacred his own people. This would have meant betraying its ideals and admitting to ethical, diplomatic, and military weakness in the immediate Mediterranean environment.

The French essayist Bernard-Henry Lévy had been deeply involved from the start of the uprising on the side of the Benghazi insurgents, and had actively lobbied French President Sarkozy to intervene. He defended the rebellion's underlying ideology at length, even after Libya turned into a free-for-all that tore the nation apart and rocked its southern and northern neighborhoods. Both France's subsequent presidents, François Hollande and Emmanuel Macron, criticized Sarkozy's lack of a political backup plan for the military operation and its unintended consequences—with the pieces left for the two of them to pick up. In a speech to the Tunisian parliament on February 1, 2018, Emmanuel Macron said the following about the persistent chaos in the country next-door:

> Europe, the United States and others undeniably are responsible for the current situation, responsible for having imagined, whatever we think of a leader, that we could substitute ourselves for the will of a people to decide its future. That, when you come down to it, removing a tyrant would solve all problems. Collectively, we have plunged Libya these last few years into lawlessness, without being able to correct the situation.

In January 2013, one of those consequences had French forces intervene in Mali in Operation Serval on the hunt for a group of jihadists who had crossed the border with arms pillaged from Libyan arsenals. Furthermore, Europe as a whole subsequently had to face hundreds of thousands of illegal African migrants shipped to its shores by Libyan traffickers, modern-day slavers emerging from the "*thawwar*"—that is, the perverted "revolutionaries" of the Arab Spring.

The system Gaddafi built secured him an exceptional four decades in power. It was based on a kind of indiscriminate terrorism blended with permanent revolution in domestic politics. In the process, he wasted some

of the largest oil reserves on the African continent. As light crude extracted at very low cost and located close to the European consumer markets, it was Libyan black gold. It abundantly financed the despot's every whim with a practically unlimited income stream. In a state with only six million inhabitants, the income was distributed to double up on traditional tribal allegiances with individual clientelization, all the while keeping the country supremely fragmented.

In his *Green Book*, Gaddafi railed against representative democracy, the multiparty system, freedom of the press, and so on as frauds. Sovereignty was to devolve into "people's committees" that swore obedience to him as the " Guide" and blended executive, legislative, and judicial powers. It was a set-up that mimicked the Red Guards during the Chinese revolution, which perpetuated disorder to reinforce Mao Zedong's absolutism. The "masses" (the regime called itself a "massocracy"—a translation of the Arab-coined word *jamahiriyya*) were regularly invited to rise up against designated scapegoats. For their efforts, they would receive randomly awarded free vehicles, homes, and food all paid for by hydrocarbon money.

To create an unvarying dependence on the despot's arbitrary rule, in Libya there was no long-term investment in infrastructure—in contrast to the Gulf emirates with their comparable ratios of population to income. It was therefore impossible for a Libyan middle class to develop—with isolated exceptions, such as in the port city Misrata—that could accumulate its own wealth. This would have threatened the dictator, who kept himself surrounded by family and a circle of relatives and close friends. In Bedouin fashion, they were called *ahl al-khayma*—"the people of the tent." It was Gaddafi's way of mixing his Third-Worldist ethic with the traditions of his tribal origins.

Paralleling this mode of governing at home, Gaddafi pursued an erratic regional politics. He pushed for mergers with his Tunisian neighbors or the impoverished Egyptians salivating over his fabulous wealth. However, his unpredictability rendered these unions null and void shortly after they were proclaimed. His pan-African ambition led to confrontations with Paris, especially in Chad, ending in the attack perpetrated by Libyan intelligence on a DC-10 of the French airline UTA going from Brazzaville to Paris. The plane exploded midair above the Ténéré desert on September 19, 1989, killing 170.

This followed the destruction of a Pan Am Boeing 747 that had departed London for New York on December 21, 1988, only to blow up over Lockerbie in Scotland. This had also been done on Gaddafi's orders, to avenge the bombardment of his Tripoli palace by the American air force. This, in turn, had been retaliation for the bombing by Libyan agents of a Berlin discotheque ten days earlier, in which two GIs had perished. All of it happened in the context of Tripoli's support for multiple terrorist groups in Europe: the Basque ETA in Spain, the Corsican FLNC in France, the Irish IRA, the Italian Red Brigades, and the Baader-Meinhof Gang in Germany. The Berlin attack had been revenge for an incident between the Libyan and American navies the previous month in the Gulf of Sirte.

Despite the cumulative evidence pointing the finger of guilt at Gaddafi, he always managed to negotiate his political survival by dispensing the incredible largesse that his oil revenues made possible. Thus, in January 1970, it was France that supplied 110 Mirage jets to Libya—an all-time record for French arms sales. Notwithstanding, ten years later, the French embassy in Tripoli and the Benghazi consulate were set ablaze by a crowd that had been duly incited by their ruler. Following the sentencing of Libyan agents by a French court in the affair of the DC-10 explosion, Gaddafi agreed to make financial amends.

Following 9/11, he convinced Western leaders that he, like his neighbor Mubarak, would be a bulwark against terrorism . . . the jihadist kind, naturally. The United Nations lifted their sanctions. Various Western countries, among them the United Kingdom and France (which, as we have seen, would be in the front ranks of the military operation intending to liquidate the regime in 2011), gained access to fabulous commercial markets. This occurred in a climate marked by various scandals—from the prestigious London School of Economics awarding an honorary doctorate to Gaddafi's son Saif al-Islam, to the despot's official visit to Paris on President Sarkozy's invitation on December 10, 2007. On this occasion, Gaddafi pitched his heated tent in the gardens of an official guest residence. Conferring on the dictator the respectability that he craved, the invitation was criticized by defenders of human rights, but it ended with the signing of ten billion dollars' worth of contracts. On March 21, 2018, Nicolas Sarkozy was questioned in a court case if his victorious 2007 election campaign had been financed with fifty million

dollars from Libya, as claimed by diverse intermediaries and Saif al-Islam, the dictator's son.

Libya's relationship with Islam was imprinted by the fantastical messianism that Gaddafi attributed to himself, in which the *Green Book* substituted for the Holy Texts. After first carrying out a violent repression against Sufism, mainly found in Cyrenaica and on which King Idris, whom Gaddafi had deposed in 1969, had relied, the latter created his own calendar. To tie it in with the Gregorian calendar starting with Christ's birth, the year zero coincided with the Prophet's death in the year 632 (ten years after the Hegira in 622 as in the Muslim era). The calendar was divided into solar (not lunar) months named after various heroes of Libyan history. For believers, this hodgepodge was blasphemous. In the eyes of the Salafists, Muslim Brothers, and other jihadists, it symbolized the despot's heresy.

But Gaddafi knew how to manipulate the emotions of the pious masses with great campaigns against "Islamophobia" that served his own ends. However, on February 17, 2006, a demonstration in front of the Italian consulate in Benghazi went off the rails. The protest was orchestrated against a Roman minister seen wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with cartoons of the Prophet published in the Danish *Jyllands-Posten* newspaper. The demonstration turned into a riot against the regime before being put down, with twenty-seven killed. This slaughter was memorialized as the "Day of Rage" on the initiative of a Libyan in exile in early 2011, during the favorable climate created by the fall of the Tunisian and Egyptian dictators. The preventive arrest on February 14 of the main lawyer for the families of the Islamists massacred on in Abu Salim prison triggered the troubles that would lead to the Benghazi uprising.

Right from the start, the religious imprinting of demands linked to human rights was much more prevalent in Libya than in its two neighboring countries. After four decades of any critical thought being crushed, the only authentic resistance, weak and persecuted as it was, came from the Islamist movement. Founded in the 1950s as the Libyan Islamic Group (*al-jamaʿa al-islamiyya bi libia*), the local branch of the Muslim Brotherhood had welcomed its Egyptian namesakes as they fled Nasser's repression in 1954. The movement was then hunted down after Gaddafi's 1969 "revolution." Surviving primarily among exiled students abroad,

it still ran a secret network of contacts inside Libya. During the 1980s, a thousand young men took part in the Afghanistan jihad. Several would become high-ranking Al Qaeda cadres.

After the fall of Kabul, the returnees formed the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (*al-jama'a al-mouqatila*) in 1995, which made three assassination attempts on Gaddafi in 1996. In revenge, 1,200 alleged members and followers of the Muslim Brotherhood were imprisoned and executed on June 29 of that same year. This massacre gave the activists in Cyrenaica—where most of the victims were from—a great moral legitimacy with their friends and fellow fighters in the struggle against the despot. Here was an odd juncture of the defense of human rights and promotion of jihadism. Many Muslim Brotherhood members were present on Benghazi's Tahrir Square in February 2011. Numerous Libyan Islamists who had found refuge in the United Kingdom had help from London in returning home. Some of them liaised with the British during the offensive against Gaddafi.

In Libya's west, where these movements were less deeply entrenched, the regime was gradually liquidated by militias formed on a tribal and regional basis. The port city of Misrata, which had the nucleus of a middle class born out of foreign trade, played a key role from the start in national deliberations due to its central geographic location and business wealth. The Arab city of Zintan, perched in the mountains of the Jebel Nefussa, raised a considerable military force and notably controlled a landing strip where Western arms were delivered to the rebellion. These two rival militias displayed their power by moving on key districts of the capital, leading to its fall on August 20–21, 2011.

Tripoli fell under the combined effect of a general uprising of the population and encirclement by brigades from the "revolutionary" tribes streaming in from throughout the country. Shortly beforehand, Gaddafi vanished; his whereabouts would remain a mystery until he was intercepted and killed two months later. Each militia gathered up trophies after the victory. The Misrata fighters grabbed the kitsch sculptures from the barracks-palace of Bab al-Azizia. The haul included a giant fist crushing an American F-4 Phantom jet to commemorate the "resistance" to the U.S. bombing of April 15, 1986, which Gaddafi had survived. The booty would decorate the museum of the local martyrs, to highlight the grand narrative of the city's fighting in the front lines of the revolution.

In the same spirit, the city obtained Gaddafi's remains on October 20. As already described, his convoy was stopped by a NATO air strike en route out of Sirte, the stronghold of his Qadhadhfa tribe. The former dictator was seized and lynched, and then killed under unclear circumstances. His cadaver was put on display in a Misrata garage, where it was subjected to many outrages to exorcise the despot's mythical status before being buried in an unknown location. Meanwhile, the fighters from the city of Zintan managed to capture the most famous of Gaddafi's sons, Saif al-Islam, as he tried to cross the border into Niger. They locked him up in a subterranean dungeon and refused to surrender him to the provisional government in Tripoli or the International Criminal Court in the Hague. They held on to him to use as a bargaining chip in any future negotiations for settling the Libyan issue.

The violence unleashed to hasten the regime's end, which was sealed by NATO's air strikes, furthering the country splintering into fiefs ruled by armed militias. This prevented the formation of a nationwide civil society. After forty-two years of dictatorship in which one man held all authority, his fall plainly showed that the national feeling was above all cemented by the revulsion that he evoked. But there was no institution in any of its long history that could have given Libya a positive dimension capable of propelling it into the future. Consequently, the elections organized under international supervision in July 2012, using voting materials furnished by the UN, only created the illusion that a democratic transition could flower, in imitation of its two neighboring states. However, the middle class that in Tunisia had supported the Supreme Authority for Safeguarding the Achievements of the Revolution in 2011, or the Quartet in 2013, had no equivalent in Libya. And, unlike in Egypt, there was no centralized army to impose national unity.

During the campaign and on election day, as I roamed from the hills of Cyrenaica and Benghazi through Sirte, Misrata, Zintan, and Zuara to Tripoli, I was struck by the stupefying proliferation of candidates' color photos. They included a number of faces with full beards identifying the Salafists. All of it was the reaction to four decades of oppression when a single image, that of Gaddafi, and only the color green were allowed. Still, few of the candidates presented any kind of program; the words "Islam, democracy, justice, freedom" were mostly hype overlaid on hollow professions of faith. In the east, the federalists demanded control of the oil

revenue, three-quarters of which came from their territory, believing themselves as having been harmed by Tripoli back to the days when Gaddafi had appropriated all of it.

The Brothers and the Tribes

The Islamists were organized on a national scale, but even they entered the battle in disarray. The Muslim Brotherhood, Salafists of varied stripes, and former "Islamic fighters" convened after April 2011, then once more in Istanbul in October under the auspices of Erdoğan's AKP party and Qatar. The thought was to have Libya serve as the geopolitical hyphen between Ennahda's Tunisia and Morsi's Egypt, and thereby make one Brotherhood empire of eastern coastal North Africa. However, even within this movement, intertribal and regional conflicts prevailed over allegiance to a shared ideology. Post-November 2011, each component reasserted its independence to maximize its own electoral prospects. In this they acted no differently than the other Libyan factions, each with its own armed group whose bullets in the final analysis prevailed over any ballot box.

Abdel Hakim Belhaj, the Islamic Fighting Group's former emir, now led the Party of the Nation (*hizb al-Watan*), which used Qatar Airways colors for its propaganda materials. Originally, Belhaj had been a companion of bin Laden in Afghanistan, and he had followed him to Sudan after 1992. However, he split from al-Qaeda over his belief that they should prioritize the fight against the "near enemy" —that is, Gaddafi—instead of the American "far enemy." This put him at odds with bin Laden.

Belhaj was arrested in Malaysia in 2004 on a tip from American and British intelligence. Eventually, he was turned over to Gaddafi, then still allied with the West, as part of the high-level "extraordinary rendition" policy. (Belhaj actually sued the British foreign minister at the time over Britain's role in his kidnapping, which somehow seemed linked to a lucrative gas exploration contract Libya had awarded to Anglo-Dutch Shell. He won his lawsuit, and received a British apology and 2.2 million pounds in compensation.) He was imprisoned and tortured in Abu Salim and condemned to death, but the sentence was not carried out. Instead, he was released in 2010 by Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, who made him his privileged interlocutor. The regime was making an overture to the Islamists at the

time to help smooth the way for Gaddafi's son and heir to take over from his father. And, when the uprising was rumbling in February of the following year in Tripoli, Belhaj was asked to appeal for calm.

He fled instead and, relying on his jihadist and tribal network, organized the "Brigade of the Martyrs of 17 February" (commemorating the bloody repression of demonstrations against the Danish cartoons of the Prophet in 2006). Belhaj's entry into Tripoli on August 20–21 was carefully staged by the Al Jazeera network, on which Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi on February 21 had called for the killing of Gaddafi by "any Muslim capable of it." And so it was Belhaj who breached the wall of the Bab al-Azizia barracks-palace, again before the same TV cameras. He was promoted to military governor of the liberated capital where his force clashed with the non-Islamist Zintan militias. From then on, the veteran jihadist would be recycled into the world of Islamic politics of the "brotherist" persuasion. Still, he could not capitalize on his credentials at the ballot box due to tribal dissension: his Party of the Nation tallied a risible vote total in July 2012. The coalition that emerged victorious from the polling stations was led by a former dignitary of the Gaddafi regime turned dissident, Mahmoud Jibril, well regarded in the United Arab Emirates and therefore hostile to the Muslim Brotherhood.

Thus, like Egypt and Tunisia, Libya was turned into an arena for the rivalries between the oil monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula. This encroachment was facilitated by the country's splintering, in which competing militias were on the hunt for cash and prepared to ditch opportunistic alliances instantly if it would maximize gains. It was a great game where access to dribbles of the oil revenues, the resale of weapons pillaged from Gaddafi's arsenals, and profits from trafficking African migrants to Europe against a background of jihadism were the pieces in the puzzle of the post-Gaddafi failed state. The aggregate framework for this scenario remained intact from 2012 to 2017 without any truly significant advances, with no individual actor capable of starring in the Libyan drama or of cooperating with the others to install a central authority.

On September 11, 2012, eleven years after al-Qaeda's "blessed double raid" on New York and Washington, the American ambassador to Libya was killed by a crowd assaulting the United States consulate in Benghazi. The protest was ostensibly about the broadcast of an anti-Islamic video by an American Copt, and had been instigated by the Ansar al-Shariʿa group.

Aggravating the security situation in this manner favored the autonomy of Cyrenaica, where one of Gaddafi's former dissident generals, Khalifa Haftar, was the rising power. He had been promoted to the rank of marshal to command a Libyan National Army base in Benghazi, and had the active support of Marshal el-Sisi after he assumed power in Egypt in the summer of 2013. Also backing Haftar was the coalition hostile to the Brothers led by the United Arab Emirates. At first, he allied himself with another opponent of the Islamists, the Zintan militias who by that point held the airport and several of Tripoli's districts. Facing them was a league of diverse Tripolitanian troops affiliated to varying degrees with Abdel Hakim Belhaj and Misrata's important military force. They sided with the Brotherhood and enjoyed support from Qatar and Turkey. The failure of the Assembly elected in 2012 to form a functioning government led to a new election in June 2014 from which a House of Representatives (HoR) emerged. However, the election was quickly invalidated by a court. This resulted in two competing parliaments: the GNC (General National Congress) in Tripoli and the HoR installed in Tobruk, east of Benghazi, where the armed jihadi presence made for an unstable situation. In July–August 2014, the Fajr Libya ("Dawn over Libya") coalition of Misrata soldiers and Islamists drove the Zintan men from their positions in Tripoli and on the airport, thereby consolidating power directed by the Muslim Brothers in the capital.

Jihadist Expansion and Human Trafficking

From the summer of 2014 to the winter of 2016–2017, ISIS thrived on the territory of the failed Libyan state. For the international community, it was one of the two most perverse effects of the spring 2011 uprising. The other was the landing of more than half a million African illegal immigrants on Europe's shores after they had boarded ship in Libya. Both situations posed security problems. The reaction by European voters to the heavy influx of migrants translated directly into a rise in of the extreme right parties, from Italy to Spain.

Several hundred local jihadists from 2012 on had joined the ranks of the insurgents in Syria, where they formed the Battar ("of the sharp sword") brigade. In the spring of 2014, many of these fighters returned battle-hardened to the port of Derna in Cyrenaica, where they ruled by force.

They assassinated their opponents, whipped and stoned drinkers of alcohol, gay people, and adulterers. Taking control of the city in October, the jihadists celebrated with military parades, using the occasion to pledge allegiance to the "caliphate" that had been proclaimed in Mosul on June 29. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi accepted them on November 13 and ordered Libya to be divided into three *wilāyat* ("provinces") of the Islamic State.

The new "caliphate" forces took advantage of the conflicts between Benghazi and Tripoli to move into Sirte starting in January 2015. Here they established what would be their major stronghold over the course of the next two years. Situated in the Qadhadhfa tribe's domain and Gaddafi's last refuge, the region had been heavily fought over and pillaged by the Misrata brigades. Signing up with ISIS after duly "repenting" and submitting to jihadism allowed the local tribesmen to make a fresh start politically by turning their enemies of yesteryear into infidels or apostates. Their region controlled the terminals of most of Cyrenaica's defunct oil pipelines, and its central location made it the ideal jumping-off point for raids toward the east and west.

Sabratha on the Tripolitanian coast also fell to the jihadist returnees from Shām, who set up more bases in districts of Benghazi and Tripoli. In the capital they bombed the grand hotels, such as the Corinthia, on January 27, 2015. These attacks and others against military and civilian targets took several hundred lives. The beheadings of twenty-one Egyptian Copts and thirty Ethiopian Christians in April, all broadcast in propaganda videos, were the closest to Europe that ISIS had ever committed such barbarous mass slaughters. They followed on the heels of the *Charlie Hebdo* and Hypercacher supermarket massacres in Paris on January 7 and 9 of that same year. However, in the midst of the chaos in Libya, the jihadists seemed like just one more militia adding their mayhem's toll to the uncountable number of victims of battles fought throughout the country. Thus, their emergence scarcely raised an eyebrow among a Libyan population accustomed to all sorts of atrocities.

This indifference contrasted with the great anxiety gripping Europe and the West, which set the stage for new armed interventions. Jihadism that spread from the Fezzan province into Mali forced France in January 2013 to launch the military operation codenamed "Serval" to take back the towns of Gao and Timbuktu. Tunisian jihadists, like those responsible for the Bardo and Sousse attacks in March and June 2015, trained in and fell

back to Sabratha. Fear of attacks on ships by boats in the manner of ancient Saracen pirates, or with missiles launched from the ISIS-controlled coast, led to renewed operations by American and French air power and Special Forces to whittle down the jihadist positions, just as they had done against Gaddafi's forces in 2011. In Sirte, it took seven months until December 2016 for the fighting to wind down. In Benghazi, it would take until July 2017 to overpower the last al-Qaeda, ISIS, and Ansar al-Sharia holdouts in the central districts of the Suq al-Hut ("the fish market") surrounding Tahrir Square, the now rundown cradle of the February 2011 uprising.

Just as in Egypt, where the regime that emerged from the coup d'état of July 2013 allowed the Salafists plenty of leeway to check the Brothers and the jihadists, the Cyrenaica enclaves were destroyed by troops led by Marshal Hafter allied with the local jihadists, with comparable results. The jihadists, who took their cues from Rabiʿ al-Madkhali—a Saudi ulema who had followers throughout the Arabic-speaking Sunni world as well as in European Muslim immigrant communities—swore allegiance to the Marshal and enmity toward the Muslim Brotherhood.

Just as the Egyptian Copts had paid the price for the regime-Salafist alliance by being cursed as "infidels," the Ibadite Berbers of Libya were condemned as "heretics." At the same time, measures to restrict women's freedom of movement and expression were instigated by preachers in the mosques. As for the ISIS fighters, unlike in Syria, they failed to control their territories in a uniform, lasting manner. Even within their ranks, tribalism prevailed over shared ideology, weakening their action capabilities and making it possible to finish them off in the areas they had dominated from Derna to Sabratha. In the spring of 2018, ISIS forces regrouped in the ungoverned southern parts of Fezzan. Fighters returning from Syria and Iraq after the fall of the ISIS caliphate gravitated there, only to be subjected to regular AFRICOM (United States Africa Command) air strikes: it considered the ISIS forces to be a resilient threat, capable of conducting isolated suicide attacks, but not of permanently occupying urban areas.

The other major concern of the international community, and primarily of Europe, tarnished forever the image of the "Libyan Spring." This was the massive illegal export of hundreds of thousands of Africans fleeing poverty from Tripolitanian ports to Italy, and from there to the rest of Europe. Beyond the humanitarian drama of those lost at sea or rescued in extreme peril from unseaworthy vessels, these were masses of impoverished, young,

barely educated people. Their reception by a rich but aging continent plagued by unemployment and worried about its demographic decline posed a fundamental political problem in receiving countries. The disquiet born of what the extreme right called "the great replacement" resulted in right-wing parties scoring gains in elections from one end of Europe to the other.

Such sentiments were stoked by the migrations, set in motion by the serial upheavals following the Arab Spring, of Africans coming up through Libya, or of refugees from Syria, Iraq, and even Afghanistan via Turkey. European measures adopted in 2017 to impede the Mediterranean sea crossing significantly reduced the flow of migrants. This consisted primarily of bribing Libyan coastal tribes with EU money to stop the boats from leaving the beaches. However, these stranded migrants were then subjected to daily abuses. The low point was reached in November 2017, when the press observed the operation of black slave markets in the Tripoli area.

Thus, the Libyan Arab Spring, born in the enthusiasm of "Revolution 2.0," hit rock bottom six years later. It had regressed in effect to the era of the Muslim slavers who used to traffic African "unbelievers" captured in raids in the forests and on the savannahs across the desert. Reduced to chattel and sold, the slaves were herded along the same routes that trucks now rolled over, packed with illegal immigrants. This appalling act echoed other slave markets opened in Mosul between 2014 and 2017. There, ISIS sold women and children of the Yazidi community they had captured after overrunning their lands. These were the sorts of markets that the French-Tunisian Boubaker El Hakim wanted to set up in Europe to auction off non-Muslim families once the black ISIS banner fluttered over the Elysée Palace.

At this juncture, the mediation taking place under UN auspices was codified on December 17, 2015 by the Libyan Political Agreement of Skhirat (in Morocco) between the rival "governments" in Benghazi and Tripoli. It hardly had a chance of succeeding. Each party to the agreement reckoned that it had more to gain by pursuing its own objectives than by building a national consensus. Two years after signature of the accord, on December 17, 2017, Marshal Haftar officially broke it, announcing that he was prepared to make himself the military leader over all of Libya. These ambitions rose to the fore at the very moment when the instability of the country's alliances obscured any prospects for peace in the medium term.

In the summer of 2014, the militias in Misrata and Zintan, "kingmakers" during the early years of the revolutionary process, had fought each other hard in Tripoli for control of the capital—with the latter on the losing end. Now, both gradually found themselves marginalized. This came as a result of the consolidation of the centers of power in Benghazi, where Marshal Haftar was in command, and in Tripoli, where Fayez al-Sarraj, recognized by the international community, had the backing of local militias. Misrata had played a crucial role in crushing the jihadist stronghold of Sirte in late 2016, but now saw itself paid little in return—the more so since its established businessmen in Benghazi had been expelled by the local tribes in exchange for supporting Marshal Haftar's enemies. The upshot was that on 28 March 2018, a Misrata delegation went to Zintan for an improbable reconciliation between the traditional rival cities. The objective was to find a way of conserving what was left of their influence in the country's two de facto capitals. In Zintan, Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, from his house arrest, expressed the ambition of returning to a time when order reigned. Never mind the abuses committed by his father the dictator—even that was much to be preferred over the current chaos. These statements competed with the somewhat similar ones entertained by Marshal Haftar in the fight for overall leadership on the country.

However, the confrontation between the tribes and Libyan militias took place in a relatively civilized framework, compared to the Syrian situation that we will turn to in the next section. Syria's was a full-blown civil war fed by the heightening of indelible interdenominational hatreds. In Libya, the warring parties played by the traditional rules for raiding: never close the door to reconciliation once the blood price has been paid. Only the inrush by ISIS temporarily threatened these balances when intensified by an ideology that took spectacular violence to extreme ends. But, finally, even jihadism was boxed in by the resilient tribes which defeated the militants in coordination with the Western bombing campaign of 2017. Except for the Ibadite Berber minority, concentrated in Jebel Nefusa, at Zuwara, and in the capital, where they were well integrated despite the Salafists cursing them as heretics, this was Sunni country.

Moreover, one institution had proved resilient against all odds: the National Oil Company (NOC). It had continued to collect the royalties paid by the importers of Libya's hydrocarbons. It then split the proceeds according to a formula that varied according to the balance of power

among tribes as well as temporary alliances and their permanent reversals. Despite the extent of the Libyan "anomie," as President Macron put it in his Tunis speech of February 1, 2018, the obstacles to reconciliation were economic rather than structural, even if they were sustained by the competition between the Turkish-Qatari and Egyptian-Emirati blocs for primacy over the region's Sunnism. That was entirely the purpose behind the mediation organized by the UN, which persisted in 2018 despite the imperfect process it began superintending in December 2015 at Skhirat. It enjoyed strong support from the international community, which, if not atoning, is still paying the price for the badly conceived European-American military intervention that contributed to Gaddafi's elimination in 2011—only to open the doors to chaos.

This was the meaning of the conference organized in Paris for May 29, 2018 by Emmanuel Macron. It brought together the head of the Government of National Accord (GNA), Fayez al-Sarraj, with Marshal Haftar, nearly a year to the day after a first meeting on July 25, 2017. The meeting also included Aguila Saleh Issa, president of the House of Representatives elected in 2014 and based in Tobruk, as well as the Muslim Brotherhood's Khaled al-Mishri, president of the High State Council in Tripoli. The meeting aimed to make a fairly broad spectrum of Libyan political figures face up to their responsibilities. This came at a time when the populists carried the parliamentary elections in Italy on the back of the migration crisis originating in Libya.

For Europe, the Libyan status quo was no longer acceptable, if only because of the political consequences for the member states' electorates translating into a steady drift toward the extreme right. With the representatives of twenty states and six international organizations present, the summit committed to holding legislative and presidential elections on December 10, 2018—an initiative that presupposed a true process of restoring trust among the main players, starting at the local level. Meanwhile, Marshal Haftar's forces conducted yet another offensive to subdue the jihadist stronghold at Derna, and the fighting in Fezzan intensified among groups seeking to share in the financial windfall from trafficking human beings from Africa. All through 2019, Marshal Haftar's forces, with financial support from Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia, moved toward a besieged Tripoli. They were repelled by a coalition of fighters that feared Haftar would impose an authoritarian regime reminiscent of Gaddafi—mimicking

his colleague and major sponsor Marshal el-Sisi's iron-fisted rule in Egypt. With Saudi and Emirati help, the Benghazi based army confronted the Tripoli coalition dominated by Muslim Brothers and supported by Qatar and Turkey. A fragmented Libya remained a battlefield by proxy for Arabian peninsula oil states competing for hegemony on the Sunni world at large.

Conclusion: Democracy, Containment, or Chaos

Three uprisings took place in the eastern part of North Africa in 2010–2011. They greased the skids for ousting the Tunisian, Egyptian, and Libyan dictators, but then went their different ways due to the social and national specifics of each country. Tunisia alone succeeded in putting together a democratic transition. But as for using the "Tunisian Spring" as an example for the rest of the region, one must use caution: was it not, after all a uniquely Tunisian scenario? Did it not have going for it the power of a middle class that is largely bicultural—Arab-French and European-Muslim—and had it not grown out of a process of modernization begun in the nineteenth century? Wasn't this what enabled Tunisia to build institutions impossible to replicate elsewhere, as analyzed by Professor Safwan Masri, who called it an "Arab anomaly"?

Be that as it may, Europe has a vital interest in sustaining Tunisian democratization by seeing it become better integrated in the northwest Mediterranean prosperity zone. This will be key to strengthen a pole of stability while the jihadist menace remains resilient, as Sinai reminds us, despite the reverses inflicted on ISIS in its Syria-Iraq stronghold in 2017 and al-Baghdadi's killing on October 27, 2019 by U.S. special forces. In this book's third part, we will see how identifying good practices, among them educating a youth that will become tomorrow's middle class, can nevertheless instill likewise values across the entire region.

On the banks of the Nile, by contrast, a resilient military power carried the day, despite being challenged by the Muslim Brotherhood, another secretive and hierarchical organization. The utopia envisioned at Tahrir Square could not transmute itself into a democratic process able to overcome the army and Brotherhood duo. The Egyptian masses, impoverished and overpopulated by a continuing birth rate much higher than the rate of economic growth, could not come together like a sovereign people in the

sense of the Greek *demos*. With daily survival the overriding imperative, the population remained a crowd (*ochlos*) under dual influencers: the military, which kept it in check, and Salafism, which gave it hope for the afterlife if they submitted to a religious norm in its most literalist dimension. This vicious cycle could only continue thanks to Egypt being bankrolled by the Arab rentier oil monarchies, who subsidized this demographic giant to keep it on their side in the context of internal battles for regional hegemony. This short-term solution created a highly uncertain dependency, the more so in an economic climate of falling hydrocarbon prices due to oil and shale gas extraction in America.

Finally, in Libya, eliminating the dictator who transformed the country into a rogue state had opened a Pandora's box that no one knew how to shut again, after years of all-out tribal warfare and a jihadist episode. The international community played a decisive role in ousting Gaddafi, but did so without a back-up political program for the aftermath of its military offensive. It focused foremost on keeping the resulting Libyan lawlessness from spilling over its borders. That was the significance of the operation led by France in Mali, starting in January 2013, to keep the Sahel from being ripped apart by jihadists coming from Libya. The same applied to the bombing of ISIS enclaves in Libya in 2015–2016 to keep them from threatening the neighboring states and the Mediterranean. And, finally, the same applied to the multiple moves made to stem the flow of illegal African migrants making for European shores from the Libyan coast. The national reconciliation process initiated by the UN had its ups and downs, including Marshal Haftar denouncing it in December 2017, convinced that only a strong military like the one in Egypt could reunify a failed state. Nonetheless, it was at least a possible framework, however fragile, for emerging from chaos.

* * *

Egypt and Libya, and to a lesser extent Tunisia, were exposed to intrusions by the oil monarchies on the Arabian Peninsula who sought to influence the Arab Spring's evolution with billions of dollars in subsidies. In an initial phase, Qatar, aided by the soft power of its Al Jazeera satellite network, smoothed the way to power for the Muslim Brotherhood—with Ennahda in Tunisia, the Morsi presidency in Egypt, and the "Libyan Dawn" coalition in Libya. Then it was the United Arab Emirates' turn to

render substantial support in concert with Saudi Arabia to the Muslim Brotherhood's adversaries, personified by the two marshals—el-Sisi in Cairo and Haftar in Benghazi—and including the Nida Tunis party. But this competition for hegemony took place within the politico-religious context of Sunni Arab Islam, and, from that standpoint, it did not take on an existential character. And, more to the point, it happened after the despots had been toppled. On the other hand, the uprisings in Bahrain, Yemen, and Syria, the other three cases we will now turn to, were taken hostage by the interdenominational fault line between Sunni and Shiites, preventing—or at least slowing considerably—the fall of their respective regimes demanded by the demonstrators.

SEVEN

Sectarianism and Derailed Rebellions

The Shiite-Sunni Fault Line

IN BAHRAIN, Yemen, and Syria, with rifts between Sunnis and various Shiite sects, Alawites or Zaydis, the rebel forces failed to overthrow the powers in place. In the past, this sort of fracturing would have had little political significance, as in Yemen, or would have wound up diluted by pan-Arabist ideology, as in Baathist Syria. But the increased Islamization of mindsets and the bidding war that broke out in 1979 between the Saudi Arabia-led Sunni side and the Shiites lined up behind Iran were game-changers. This aggravation of religious antagonism made into an instrument of geopolitical confrontation reached new heights with Iran's ascendancy in Baghdad. Iraq had been ruled by a Sunni minority during the Saddam Hussein era. But the American invasion followed by the occupation from 2003 to 2011 tipped the country into the hands of the Shiite parties who represented the majority confession. In Bahrain, the trauma manifested itself when the March 2011 uprising was aborted by the Gulf Cooperation Council, having been stigmatized from the start as Shiite and manipulated by Iran. For the GCC, the sectarian reading of the event reinforced by Arabs pitted against Persians overrode any other consideration.

With the Sunni order restored in Manama, this same split conditioned the response to the Syrian uprising against Bashar al-Assad. Only now the frontlines were flipped, since the minority Alawites held power and most rebels came from the Sunni population. But the support for the insurgents and for the regime fit into this logic of sectarian alignment: Sunni powers

backed the former and Iran and its allies the latter. The Yemeni uprising initially split along tribal and regional lines. It was not gripped by this sectarian antagonism until three years later when, in 2014, the pro-Shiite Houthis took Sanaʿa, triggering an intervention by a Saudi-led Sunni coalition.

In contrast to the outcomes on the southern shores of the Mediterranean, these challenged regimes were not toppled. Sectarian solidarities—mainly in Bahrain and Syria—protected them and kept the uprising from spreading. Moreover, there was no grand "moment of enthusiasm" in either country that could have transcended the religious fractures. Against the odds, Ali Abdullah Saleh, the former Yemeni president who had gradually relinquished power in the year following the revolt, returned to Sanaʿa. He did so by ditching old alliances and coming to terms with the Houthis. That is, until he tried one more flip-flop that would have brought him closer to Riyadh. It would turn out to be his last—the Houthis had him killed for it in December 2017.

The easternmost nations involved in the Arab Spring thus had different outcomes. The quick restoration of the ruling power in Bahrain degraded the rebellion of February-March 2011 into continuous Shiite restiveness that the regime's police repressed in a framework of "normalization." In Yemen, the conflict was regionalized but not truly globalized. The Western powers intervened only indirectly against the international jihadists based there.

In Syria, however, the civil war heavily involved the neighboring states, foremost being Iraq, itself a victim of the many-sided confrontation between Shiites and Sunni, Arabs and Kurds. But it also drew in Lebanon, Iran, Turkey, and Jordan; the oil monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula; Russia; and NATO's most operationally ready members led by the United States. When ISIS started escalating their executions of Western hostages, then coordinating terrorist attacks in Europe from its territory, this internationalization expanded. It intensified following June 2014's proclamation of the "caliphate" in Mosul until the fall of its capital, Raqqa, in October 2017. The jihadists' military defeat brought down with it the Syrian rebellion, which, in the eyes of the world, ISIS had succeeded in taking hostage. Bashar al-Assad and his Russian and Iranian allies claimed victory—but it was shakier than they made it appear. As we will see in Part III, the fall of the "Islamic State" translated into a much more complex reshuffling of the Middle East deck of cards. It also led to changes in how the region related

to the rest of the world in a context of falling hydrocarbon prices, which impacted it profoundly.

The Sunni Abort Bahrain's Uprising

On February 14, 2011, tens of thousands of protesters converged on Manama, Bahrain's capital. Three days had passed since the news of Mubarak's removal from office. In Libya, protesters were preparing to march the next day in Benghazi, where they had their own version of Cairo's Tahrir Square. The Manama demonstrators also modeled their protests on the Cairo uprising by occupying Pearl Square in the heart of the capital. Its name derived from the pearls harvested from oysters that had made the Gulf rich before the petroleum era.

The population of Bahrain, with a landmass equaling 295 square miles, is the smallest of any Arab state. At the time, it counted 1.3 million inhabitants, including 700,000 citizens, most of them Shiites. However, the ruling Al Khalifa family, whose ancestors had taken the country over in the eighteenth century, was Sunni, like the rest of the dynasties in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) except for Ibadite Oman. The Council comprises Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Saudi Arabia. These six oil monarchies came together in May 1981 to stem Iranian expansion after the victorious Khomeini proclaimed the Islamic Republic in 1979. A mutual assistance pact shields the Council members in case of aggression (by Teheran).

Situated on the opposite shore of the Gulf, which some call the Arab Gulf and others the Persian Gulf, the Iranian giant in 2011 had seventy-five million inhabitants. That was not enough for Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, who wanted to double Iran's population as part of an overt policy of seeking regional predominance. Despite this, the Islamic Republic had seen its birthrate stall thanks to an emerging middle class. Much to the annoyance of the ayatollahs, Iranian women were having less than two children each. Meanwhile, the birth rate in the neighboring Arab countries continued its sustained growth.

Because of Bahrain's denominational distribution, sociologically speaking most of the demonstrators in Pearl Square were Shiite. Their slogans, however, had a universal character and called for respect for both human

rights and social justice. The state did have democratic institutions, in fact, including an elected parliament and a judicial system inherited from British colonial days (which ended in 1971). However, the real power resided in the dynasty. A drawn-out insurrectionary conflict that its instigators called an Intifada, like the Palestinian revolt, had pitted the Shiite population against the previous monarch, who had governed by repression, imprisonments, and exiling people.

When King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa ascended to the throne in 1999 with promises of reform and amnesty, he got a political breather. But a disillusioned new generation of opponents spawned the 2011 uprising to protest the return to authoritarian rule, an eroding standard of living for the Shiite masses, and a feeling of alienation from their own country. Indeed, with dwindling oil reserves, luxury real-estate development along the coast—that mimicked such areas in Dubai or Qatar—cut the fishermen living in impoverished traditional villages off from the sea and ruined the palm groves. Immigrants took the unskilled and service jobs, and—the last straw—eased citizenship requirements for Sunni Arab foreign residents stoked a fortress mentality in Shiite circles. It rekindled historical memories of the *sukhra*—forced labor—imposed by the Al Khalifa dynasty after it had conquered the island.

This was the situation when the uprising of February 2011 started. It readily picked up the universal "Revolution 2.0" lingo that originated on Tahrir Square and spread via social media. It helped that young Bahrainis of all denominations were products of a good educational system in which the use of the English language was widespread. The demonstrators demanded true democracy and redistribution of wealth among all citizens. As in Tunisia and Egypt, the disproportionately large contingent of dissatisfied graduates—as Shiites, they felt they were being discriminated against in hiring—among the demonstrators played a large role in the sloganeering. Here, too, a number of activists had been trained in nonviolent protest techniques in Balkan think tanks linked to the billionaire philanthropist George Soros. After many clashes with the police, the demonstrators occupied Pearl Square on February 19, and they would not leave it until March 16.

The power made a few concessions, influenced by a reformist tendency embodied by the crown prince. He was anxious to renew a political consensus more congenial to the majority of the population. There was talk

of an inclusive national dialogue. Opponents were allowed to return from exile, among them the head of *Al- Haq* ("The Truth") the most radical party. When he demanded the establishment of a republic, it was like waving the proverbial red cloth in front of a bull—in this case, the prime minister, who was also the king's uncle. The PM favored a hard line out of regional considerations as much as Bahraini ones, and so he was a natural mouthpiece for the Saudi position on the issues of the day.

First, the overthrow of one of the Arabian Peninsula's dynasties would have created an extremely prejudicial precedent for the political system prevailing in the GCC. Already there had been incidents in Kuwait as early as December 2010, where pro-democracy elements among the merchant middle class had pressed the parliamentary opposition to harass the monarchy. Even Saudi Arabia was not immune to challenges inspired by Tahrir Square. Unemployment among its citizens was rising steadily in the face of a population growth rate of over 2 percent while income redistribution stagnated. Besides these internal political considerations—which six years later would see even the Saudi system initiate a major reform of its economic and social model—the prime GCC motivator in repressing the Bahraini revolt was the specter of Iranian hegemony.

During my visit to Manama in October 2012, my contacts among the government or Sunni activists invariably insisted that the uprising was controlled from Teheran. Further, they were convinced that its sole objective was to turn the island into a satellite of Teheran Islamic Republic. I had noticed, in March 2011, that Al Jazeera hardly broadcasted any images from the Manama upheaval. It had set up an entire studio on Tahrir Square during crucial weeks to report on the Cairo events. It had also covered Gaddafi's overthrow in direct broadcasts from Benghazi. The following month, I saw on Cairo's Midan Tahrir how unwelcome Bahrainis were who had come to support the Egyptians. They were accused of Shiite "sedition" (*fitna*) or having an Iranian orientation.

Lastly, during my interviews in Qatar in October 2012 with Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the celebrity Egyptian Muslim Brother who was also Al Jazeera's chief television preacher, he assured me that "in Bahrain, it is not a revolution by all the people." He went on to say that it was a revolt by one denomination against another, "the Shiites against the Sunni." He concluded emphatically with: "Bahrain is an Arab Gulf country, it cannot be allowed to leave it for Iran!" Everyone I spoke with was obsessed by the

trials Iraq was going through, the American troops having abandoned it to Shiite domination and Iranian influence when they departed from the region in 2011.

On the other hand, members of the Shiite parties and journalists, academics, and activists from that sect were unanimous in calling Bahrain's regime autocratic. They saw the uprising as challenging the ruling power in the name of equality and human rights, and denied that Teheran had any influence on it. Still, in the international community many voices were calling for democratizing the other Arab Spring countries. Some among them—namely, the oil- and gas-importing OECD countries—worried about Bahrain becoming a stand-in for Iran and possibly even threatening the loading of their tankers. And, for the United States, with its Fifth Fleet based in Manama, being under the thumb of a hostile power in these vital port facilities was unthinkable.

It came as no surprise then, when on Monday, March 14, a few thousand Saudi troops with tanks crossed the sixteen-mile King Fahd Causeway connecting Bahrain with Saudi Arabia. They were flanked by Emirati police and Qatari troops belonging to the "Shield of the Peninsula" force of the GCC. The leaders of the opposition parties were arrested, Pearl Place was evacuated starting on March 16, and the monument in its center was pulled down two days later to erase the last vestiges of the uprising. The grounds, soon encircled by razor wire, would be transformed into the Al Farooq ("the Just") Traffic Circle. This is the moniker of Omar, the second caliph (634–644) and successor of Abu Bakr, whom the Sunni idolize for his great conquests but the Shiites (and Iran in particular, for the ravages he visited on their country) curse for having sidelined Imam Ali.

Seven days before the start of the real spring, the "Bahraini Spring" ended with the erasure of its symbolic happening. However, the challenge to the regime continued to echo in the marginalized Shiite villages, as I can testify from having been caught up in Baluchi (Sunni) and Yemeni contingents of the anti-riot police in October 2012 as they put down a village demonstration. There were strict limitations on how any kind of opposition could express itself, while the rest of the island slowly returned to normal. Most notable was the restart of the Formula 1 Grand Prix race in 2012 that had been suspended since the uprising.

Besides being a turning point in the modern history of Bahrain, the forcible stifling by the GCC of a revolt condemned as Shiite and Iran-loving

took on a decisive meaning for the fate of the three easternmost Arab Springs. It reflected the essential facts that would differentiate this trio of uprisings from those in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya on the African coast. All of the latter occurred in majority Sunni states where the national dynamic held together to topple their respective despots in the end. It was not until later that the rivalry between the oil monarchies—primarily Qatar and the United Arab Emirates—intervened to support or stymie takeovers in them by the Muslim Brotherhood.

In Bahrain, on the other hand, the regional stakes almost immediately swept away any domestic considerations. Once again, it started as a denominational conflict that wound up being aggravated by the confrontation between Arabs and Iranians. The GCC tanks rumbled into an economic situation strained by the random hazards of hydrocarbon production in the Gulf and exports to the world market. Oil prices were trending downward, which only served to embitter the conflict over these resources. Starting on the Bahraini stage, the drama would move on to two other venues. One was located on the southern end of the peninsula, in Yemen, where the insurrection initially took on a tribal and cultural character. Soon, it too would get caught up in the tug of war between the Iran-Shiite and Arab-Sunni camps. But to the north, in Shām—the Levant—the drama would intensify as the curtain rose first on the Syrian uprising, then on the next act in a dysfunctional Iraq, only to climax with the creation of the ISIS caliphate.

From Yemeni Tribalism to Sectarian Clash

The removal and exile on January 14, 2011 of Tunisia's dictator Ben Ali after a quarter-century's reign was greeted in Sanaʿa, Yemen's capital, with the slogan "Ali! Join your pal Ben Ali!" It was addressed to President of Yemen Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had held power for thirty-three years. The announcement that Saleh's son Ahmad would eventually take over from him had angered even Saleh's supporters. It mirrored what happened in Cairo, where the prospects of a hereditary successor to Mubarak had alienated the "Mameluke" General Staff and paved the way for the uprising.

Yemen's regime, unlike the autocracies that ruled Tunisia, Egypt, or Libya, rested on a complex consensus between tribal and local politicians.

Under Ali Saleh's guidance, North Yemen and the Marxist-Leninist Republic of South Yemen had unified in 1990. In 1994, a secession movement had to be put down in the South, while Zaydi (a local sect of Shia persuasion, though close to the Sunni mainstream) protests spread in the northern mountains. To keep it all together, Ali Saleh's Machiavellian scheming had achieved a shaky equilibrium based on overarming the tribes, and cemented by the daily social chewing of *khat*. Chewing the leaves of this shrub, a ritual which usually starts at midday, induces a mildly narcotic, mood-elevating high. It tamps down tensions among the participants in sessions where opposing parties amicably script how to confront each other in a calculated manner the next morning.

Throughout his term, Ali Saleh was a master at co-opting different political forces by constantly switching alliances. Still, a profound split persisted in Yemeni society. On one side were members of the political-tribal system of parties—presidential or oppositional, secular or Islamist—who benefited from clientelism and generalized corruption. (Yemen's level of corruption placed it among the world's thirty worst offenders.) On the other side was everyone else excluded from this system. Among the latter, the urban youth and students made up large contingents in a population suffering malnutrition rates that were some of the highest on the planet. Half of them lived below the poverty threshold, 65 percent were under the age of twenty-five, and more than a third were officially unemployed.

The events in Tunis and then Cairo broadcast by Al Jazeera reverberated most in this group of recent graduates, nourished on illusory promises by the educational system. They celebrated Ben Ali's fall with a march through Sanaʿa on February 3, 2011. But it was especially the news of Mubarak's ousting on the eleventh that set up the first sizable demonstration on Friday the eighteenth as the mosques emptied. Protests in other parts of the country broke out on the twenty-fifth. More so than distant Tunisia, Egypt had always been the major reference for Yemen: Nasser had sent an expeditionary corps between 1962 and 1967 in support of a republican coup led by military officers against the royalists supported by Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, a large part of the Yemeni elite was educated in Egypt, back in the 1950s when its faculties were the most famed in the Arab world.

But now Sanaʿa had its own university. It was on the square in front of it that the local version of the uprising on Tahrir Square played out. Expecting to oust the president in a few weeks as their counterparts in Cairo had done,

the demonstrators rebaptized the place *sahat al-taghyir* ("Change Square"). The capital had an officially named Liberation (*Tahrir*) Traffic Circle, but it had been occupied earlier by crowds close to Ali Saleh. These now called on their clients in the neighboring mountains to come set up camp on the roundabout to express their support for Saleh. From the outset, however, this revolutionary momentum had difficulty fitting into a national context in which there was no homogeneous "people" that was supposed to "want the fall of the regime." In its stead existed an improbable mix of ethnic and regional factions, each of which could mobilize competing troops as demanded by shifting coalitions. And, unlike in Tunisia and Egypt, the General Staff was in no position to kick out the president: Ali Saleh could manipulate tribes whose firepower was a match for anything the regular army could bring.

A Mosaic of Tribes as a Substitute for Democracy

During the occupation of Change Square in front of the university, a stream of students, recognizable by their modern way of dressing in pants and short-sleeved shirts, made up slightly less than half of the crowd. Joining them were tribesmen clad in the traditional white robe, with the *jambiya* (a curved dagger in a scabbard of brown leather) stuck in the belt and a Kalashnikov within reach. (Every inhabitant of Yemen is said to own three firearms.) Also in evidence were activists from a pro-Shiite sect in the North, carrying red and green signs that read, "Allah Akbar! Death to America! Death to Israel! Cursed be the Jews! Victory to Allah!" These were opponents of Ali Saleh, against whom he had fought six wars and had still be unable to defeat them for good.

These "Followers of God" (*Ansar Allah*), dubbed "Houthis" after their leaders' family name, would play a considerable role in the uprising's interdenominational escalation. Instead of lasting just eighteen days like the uprising in Cairo, the demonstrations in Sanaʿa seemed to go on forever. The tribes came down to the capital with their tents and could stay as long as they wanted as they applied necessary pressures. This was an Arab tradition well established ever since Ibn Khaldun first described it in the fourteenth century.

When I passed through Sanaʿa in January 2012, nearly one year after the occupation of Change Square had started, the site had been transformed

into a well-laid-out encampment with sleeping quarters, eating facilities, and a variety of debate forums. In fact, I was invited to address one of them in Arabic. The audience members, kept from traveling abroad by poverty, were infinitely eager for stories and eyewitness accounts of the Arab Spring. They projected their hopes and dreams on the events in Cairo and, to a lesser degree, Tunis, but not on Libya, where I had also been. Although Libya's tribal structure resembled their own, the Yemenis I met generally wanted no part of the chaos prevailing there.

Faithful supporters and sworn opponents of the president thus divided Sanaʿa and occasionally exchanged proportional bombardments with mortars between areas where each were entrenched, without trying to wipe the other out. In this way, they abided by their traditional codes of war, interspersed with parleys and consultations around khat-chewing get-togethers. I paid a visit to Sheikh Sadiq al-Ahmar, a former ally turned sworn enemy of Ali Saleh, in his palace that had been half-destroyed by rockets. But he received me with all the pomp befitting the dignitary of the Hached tribal confederation that he was. Ceremoniously munching khat, surrounded by his peacocks, he proceeded to lay out the future of the opposition coalition of which he was a mainstay. Named the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), the coalition was an unlikely amalgam. It contained the Muslim Brotherhood by way of the Islah ("reform") party co-led by a sheikh, the secular Hirak Janubi or "Movement of the South" that demanded autonomy or full independence for Aden and its region, and finally the great tribes that had broken with Ali Saleh. The JMP saw the student uprising as an opportunity for weakening the president as well extorting more emoluments from him—or else replacing him with someone more receptive to the coalition's unyielding demands. The president, for his part, headed up the General People's Congress (GPC). Despite some defections, he could rely on the well-pampered and especially loyal elite troops, the air force, and the intelligence apparatus.

These two leagues contending for power tried to control or channel the events in the square, but their members remained on the fringes. As for the students, the middle class, and the urban poor who had started it all, they had no voice in determining the country's future because they were outgunned. Two heavily armed extremist politico-religious forces, the Houthis and jihadists, would benefit most from the Yemeni Spring by upsetting the traditional equilibriums. They did so in effect by hijacking the movement.

The uprising's escalation and then its descent into civil war gradually made both the Houthis and jihadists the ultimate beneficiaries of the chaos inserting itself into denominational antagonisms throughout a divided Middle East.

Besides being fragmented along tribal lines, Yemen is divided geographically between the northern mountains and the southern and coastal plains. As elsewhere in the Arab world, altitude offered refuge to heresies and allowed pre-Islamic religions to survive. By contrast, the flatlands fostered the spread of orthodoxy. This north-south split, which more or less tallies with the respective territories of the former states of North and South Yemen, also opposed the heights that surround Sanaʿa (topping out at roughly 7,400 feet), where Zaydism, a moderate branch of Shiism, is prevalent, to Aden and the coastal provinces of Hadhramaut, or Abyan, crisscrossed by caravan trails, where the Chafeite rite of Sunnism—its most tolerant version—has the upper hand.

Zaydism takes its name from Zayd ibn Ali (712–740), venerated by his followers as the fifth and last legitimate Imam (while the Shiite Twelvers substitute the Imam Muhammad al-Baqir [712–743] for him). Zaydism exhibits traits that make it comparable to Sunnism, which accounts for the two sects having coexisted over fourteen centuries. It was the doctrine of the Imamat regime based in Saada, the northern city that today is still a bastion of this belief, followed by Sanaʿa. In 1962, when Arab nationalist officers overthrew the Imam, a civil war broke out between monarchists aided by Saudi Arabia, the West, and Israel, and dissidents supported by Nasser and his sponsor, the Soviet Union. Despite having stalemated the Egyptian expeditionary corps, in the end Riyadh recognized the Republic of Yemen in 1970. With the Imamat's disappearance, Zaydism lost its political dimension as the state ideology.

Radicalizing Sects

At that juncture, Muqbil bin Hadi (1933–2001), a preacher from a Zaydi background who had converted to radical Salafism in Saudi Arabia, condemned his former fellow believers as heretics. Linked to the Mecca jihadists of 1979, he was imprisoned before being expelled to his native country. There he started a madrasa at Dammaj near Saada. He named it *Dar al-Hadith*

("the house of the sayings and deeds of the Prophet") and dedicated it to the most strident kind of indoctrination. His reputation and plentiful resources helped him attract students from around the world, especially Europeans, but also Indians, Pakistanis, Indonesians, and Africans. However, his main targets were young Zaydis whom he talked into excommunicating their parents.

The reaction to his excesses and those of his disciples in this setting came in the form of a movement, the "Believing Youth" (*al-shabab al-muʾmin*), led by a family of activists named the Houthis. The Believing Youth adopted Teheran's revolutionary theology as an antidote to Muqbil's fanatical salafist sectarianism. It was a logical move, in a context where Zaydi doctrine was deprived of a political vehicle, while Iranian Shiism, thanks to the establishment of the Islamic Republic, boasted a theocracy. The slogans chanted at all Believing Youth meetings were obsessively anti-American and anti-Semitic, doubling down on "death to Israel!" with "cursed be the Jews!". But, oddly enough, they were aimed at Saudi Arabia and Salafism—accused of being henchmen of the United States and the Jewish state (in this it followed the Iranian propaganda line).

The Houthis also fed on the ancient antagonism toward a Jewish community that had flourished under the Zaydite Imamat before all of its 50,000 members emigrated to Israel in 1949, leaving only a few hundred individuals behind. In 2009, the Houthis threatened to exterminate the remaining Jews in the village of Salem, near Saada, accusing them of Zionist activities. They had to flee to the capital under presidential protection. Besides, the "curse" (*laʿana* in Arabic), a Koranic term attached to Jews (Sura 5, verses 13 and 64), is also used in the Shiite body of works against the Caliph Omar, an uncompromising, fanatical figure in Sunnism that the Shiites condemn for having persecuted their Imam Ali. The "curse" still lives today as a jingle in popular piety repeated by his followers.

The Houthis nursed a violent hatred for the president (though a Zaydi himself) for several reasons. For one, they suspected Ali Saleh of giving free rein to Muqbil al-Wadiʿi and his disciples to conduct their aggressive salafist proselytizing because the Saudis were paying him off. For another, Saleh had launched military attacks against them six times in the years between 2004 and 2011, one of them costing the Houthi founder his life. His brothers took over the clan's leadership. Finally, the conflict in Saada was also taken hostage by the regional denominational contest between Shiites and Sunni.

The Houthis had the backing of Teheran, which they minimized and their enemies exaggerated, while Ali Saleh's side received strong support from the Saudis and Emiratis. In geopolitical terms, Ansar Allah ("Followers of Allah")—the Houthi party's official name—relates to the Wahhabite kingdom and Yemen the way Hezbollah does to the Jewish state and Lebanon. The former harassed the Saudi frontier, the latter fired Scuds or rockets into Israel; the Houthis took control of Sanaʿa, while Hezbollah took over Beirut. Seen in that light, both cities constituted a kind of staging area for Iranian hegemony. In that spirit, the Houthis sent detachments into the capital from their Saada stronghold when the uprising started in 2011. Profiting from the weakened regime, they blended with the demonstration in the tent city on Change Square, and so gained a foothold in Sanaʿa. This positioned them to take it over completely three years later.

Paralleling radicalized Zaydis drawing closer to Teheran in the north, Yemeni Sunnism cultivated a relationship with jihadists in the south. A distinctive element favoring such a tie was that the bin Laden family had originated in Hadhramaut. Osama's father, born in this region known for its sumptuous structures built with clay bricks, emigrated to Saudi Arabia to become the most prominent public works contractor there. Having the ear of the king, he was put in charge of the expansion of the Great Mosque of Mecca.

Besides its connection with al-Qaeda's founder, South Yemen also facilitated the spread of jihadism through the presence of a large contingent of Sunni veterans from the 1980s Afghan war. Many had fled South Yemen when it still had a Marxist regime that repressed the local Islamists. These former fighters, duly indoctrinated and with military training, had returned home in the early 1990s to a nation reunified under President Saleh. To reduce the influence of southern socialists in the coalition government, Saleh had allied himself with the Islah Islamist party. A mix of the Muslim Brotherhood and tribal chiefs, it welcomed the "Afghan Arabs" returning from the battlefield into its inner circle.

These veteran jihadists then went after southern leaders in a campaign of assassinations. When the South tried to secede in 1994, the jihadists redoubled the violence with the ruling power's assistance, imposing Salafist order on the erstwhile secularized Aden. Measures ranged from trashing the last brewery to the dynamiting of Sufi tombs to compelling women to wear the niqab (face veil). During the second half of the decade, the

jihadists stood up to "the Islamic Army of Aden-Abyan." The name referenced the Prophet's hadith which reads, "12,000 men came out of Aden-Abyan, giving victory to Allah and His messenger." The group was based in the region and served as staging post for al-Qaeda's attack in October 2000 on the American USS Cole refueling in Aden's harbor. A suicide bomber rammed a dinghy laden with explosives into the ship's side, killing seventeen sailors. The main suspect in the attack had been ignored by the local security services.

The bitter irony is that Yemen, considered a frontline state against al-Qaeda after 9/11, received American military aid by the tens and then by the hundreds of millions of U.S. dollars to hunt down the jihadists on its soil. The vulnerability of its tribal structure to terrorist penetration, facilitated by Salafism flourishing in the south after the 1994 raid, helped Yemen's presidential circle qualify for a stipend paid by Washington in the name of the "War on Terror."

In 2003, the invasion of Iraq by the United States and its allies set off a new wave of departures for the battlefield and intensified anti-Western radicalization. Simultaneously, the high-value prisoners held in Sanaʿa's maximum security prison escaped in February 2006 with a good deal of inside help. Among the escapees were the founders of Al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which in 2009 brought together Yemeni and Saudi followers of bin Laden. They were joined by nationals of Gulf countries and foreigners looking for military training and indoctrination. One of the Kuachi brothers, the assassins responsible for the massacre of the *Charlie Hebdo* team, received his terrorism training from AQAP to which he swore allegiance.

When the uprising started in February 2011, AQAP took advantage of the resulting lag in the security apparatus. It emulated Tunisia's Abu Ayyad al-Tunisi, who capitalized on the opening of his country's jails and turned to proselytizing in the impoverished neighborhoods. AQAP also took its cue from the Libyan jihadists who prospered by exploiting tribal divisions. Under similar circumstances, AQAP created a popular movement to unite its followers that blended radical doctrine with concern for social issues. Like their two models, they called it Ansar al-Shariʿa ("Followers of Sharia"). The movement took over the town of Abyan and its Indian Ocean coastline in May 2011, three months after the uprising started. Like a mirror image of the Houthis, who imposed Shiite morality in the northern areas they

controlled, Ansar al-Shariʿa oppressed Abyan and its surrounding region for more than a year. In this, it more or less replicated how its Libyan sister organization treated the port of Derna in Cyrenaica. Meanwhile, the group also threatened Aden, where I visited in January 2012 and found its residents panicked at the thought of their city falling into the hands of jihadists. They were a mere twenty miles away, applying sharia in an orgy of whippings, amputations, and beheadings.

In February 2012, mediation started by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) the previous November resulted in Ali Saleh stepping down under a grant of personal immunity. It spared him (for the time being) from the unenviable fate of his peers Ben Ali, Mubarak, and Gaddafi. His vice president, Marshal Abdel Rabbu Mansour Hadi, a southerner from Abyan (who would retake the city of his birth the following May) replaced him. However, Ali Saleh's influence over Yemeni politics with its permanently shifting alliances was undiminished. Dashing the hopes of the international community, Saleh's successor did not manage to reassert the state's authority because he was hostage to different tribal and regional actors caught up in permanent conflict.

Among the measures Hadi took, a realignment of Yemen into six provinces deprived Saada of access to the Red Sea and of profits from harbor contraband. By worsening their lot, Hadi's actions antagonized the local population of economically marginalized Zaydis and strengthened the Houthi's social and anti-establishment dimensions. The movement then added to the ranks of its militias to reinforce its absolute power to control the border with Saudi Arabia before launching a raid on the capital. Its force entered it in September 2014, aided by troops and tribes still loyal to Ali Saleh. Retaliation came two months later, with the massacre of 140 Houthis in a blast in one of their mosques as they chanted, "Death to America! Death to Israel! Cursed be the Jews!"

ISIS claimed responsibility for the killings, marking its debut in a country whose jihadist scene was still dominated by groups more or less closely affiliated with al-Qaeda, namely AQAP and Ansar al-Shariʿa. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, when he proclaimed himself caliph in Mosul on June 29 of that year, accepted the pledge of allegiance by the Yemeni branch of ISIS. But the organization played second fiddle in Yemen because it failed to penetrate the tribal networks, while its rivals excelled at it. This was vastly different from the situation in Syria and Iraq, where ISIS prevailed.

In February 2015, President Hadi, a virtual prisoner in his Sanaʿa palace and fearing for his life, fled to Aden. The following month, the new Saudi minister of defense, Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, took command of a GCC military coalition. It had the support of the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, with several Sunni states, Morocco among them, also taking part. Coalition planes bombed the Houthi-dominated areas north of the Yemeni capital, with the objective of reinstalling Marshal Hadi in the palace. The Houthis retaliated, launching a lightning offensive toward the south and capturing Aden, forcing the president to flee again, this time to Riyadh. Emirati troops would not retake Aden until July, after four months of house-to-house fighting.

Taking advantage of the confused situation, in April AQAP occupied Mukalla, the main port of Hadhramaut Province on the Indian Ocean. It took the Emirati troops a year to evict them, and even then the jihadists remained in control of the backcountry. The local population, in fact, viewed the Houthi offensive in the south as a Shiite invasion of lands that were traditionally Sunni. Therefore, since their fellow believers of AQAP were defending them, the residents of Hadhramaut temporarily acquiesced to that group taking over, even if they didn't necessarily want any part of their ideology. A comparable phenomenon emerged in Iraq, albeit on a much larger scale, in which Sunni areas that rejected Shiite domination paved the way for ISIS taking over Mosul in June 2014.

The widening religious divide thus aided the most radical elements in each camp, pro-Iranian Houthis on one side and fanatically Sunni jihadists on the other. Each remolded sectarian entities by sharpening their mutual antagonisms so both could base their respective authority on their own sect. A similar intensification threatened the traditional coexistence between Zaydis and Chafeitis—one of the keys to Yemeni identity and balances. Nevertheless, the grip in which both groups held the population was mainly dictated by the ebb and flow of the civil war: neither succeeded in grinding down the tribal structure—a potential platform for national reconciliation.

Perhaps it was the still-premature hope for a reconciliation that in the end proved fatal for the former president, Ali Saleh. He had survived all the reversals during the time of permanently shifting alliances in his more than three-decade long political career. The demonstrators in 2011 had called in vain for him to step down, and finally on December 4, 2017, he was

killed in Sanaʿa after one last attempt at switching sides. The leaders of the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, caught up in a military offensive with uncertain prospects, had contacted him again. Little wonder, because the human and financial tolls of the two years of hostilities were mounting. An estimated 10,000 were dead. with 50,000 injured; seven million Yemenis were malnourished and one million had come down with cholera. The GCC leaders wanted to promote Saleh's son Ahmad, living in Abu Dhabi, as a prop for reconciliation.

Ali Saleh began criticizing his Houthi allies in the summer of 2017, calling them "simple militias" that did not represent the Zaydis. He also announced his willingness to cooperate on a GCC peace plan in early December. But in both instances he overestimated his strength and maneuvering room: the Houthis condemned him for "treason" and killed him when he visited a tribal area he thought he had won over. The assassins staged his end so that it looked like he had been killed in a barrage while trying to flee the capital. Videos streamed over social networks showed his corpse being desecrated by a furious crowd. The idea may have been to evoke Gaddafi's final agony, to conflate the two former strongmen with the same public disgrace. In the end, Ali Saleh was actually still far more popular than the Libyan dictator.

The six years elapsed since the beginning of a Yemen Spring had fragmented a people supposedly seeking the regime's fall. It remained a society held hostage by the heightened conflict that intersected with the fault line dividing Shiites and Sunni. The shameful passing from the scene of Ali Saleh, who had embodied three decades of governing by compromise, did not change that. The war in Yemen ground on as part of the fight for regional dominance that Riyadh and Teheran were waging, of which the war for control of the Levant—the Shām—constitutes the culmination.

But in 2018, while Saudi planes were bombing Houthis in their mountain hideouts, the United Arab Emirates, projecting air and naval forces, controlled the entire Indian Ocean coast in the south. All the while, Abu Dhabi troops were encouraging the separatist instincts harbored by those nostalgic for the old South Yemen state whose flags still fluttered everywhere. Based on the continent at Muqalla and at Aden, they occupied the island of Socotra, which controls the straits of Bab-el-Mandeb, the gateway to the Red Sea. Next, they negotiated ports and installations as far as the autonomous areas of Somaliland and Puntland in Somalia, as well as Eritrea.

The negotiating power of Abu Dhabi of course overwhelmed that of the failed, destitute states on the Horn of Africa. For the fabulously wealthy petromonarchy, the Yemen conflict was an excuse to seize control of a vast maritime expanse through which one of the world's major tanker sea lanes passes, and to become a major regional player. But in Yemen, it remains to be seen if this fragmentation introduced from abroad will be permanent. Or will the flux of Yemeni identities and their way of doing business, symbolized by the khat sessions, bring the adversaries together? Perhaps therein lies hope for the country freeing itself of the sectarian chokehold.

From the Syrian Uprising to Jihad in the Levant

The war in the Levant brought into focus all the dramas and tensions released by the Arab uprisings. It fashioned them into an incredible horror show symbolic of the early twenty-first century. This war combined the most archaic, poisonous ethnic and sectarian throwbacks in a novel way with the most advanced communication technologies. It splashed religious extremism onto Facebook walls, Twitter feeds, and encrypted messaging apps. Apocalyptic fanaticism and cruelty thus rose to a crescendo in the virtual world, in the process luring a global audience with voyeuristic staging and social media tools. Starting with a democratic revolt against the arbitrary Syrian regime, the movement in a few months evolved into an armed insurrection that set the Levant ablaze. But once again it was rapidly hijacked by the regional conflict between the Salafist-dominated Sunnis and the Shiites, which would soon pull in all of the surrounding powers.

Blending with the preexisting Sunni rebellion in Iraq, the Syrian uprising ended up in the proclamation on June 29, 2014 of the ISIS caliphate, which erased the border between the two countries in the name of the Umma, the worldwide community of Muslim believers. The caliphate then turned into the epicenter of third-stage international jihadism. Propelled by the ideology of the two Abu Musabs—al-Suri and al-Zarqawi—it would plunge the planet into mourning, from Paris to Nice, from Berlin to Brussels and their disenfranchised banlieues, from the Mediterranean sea to the Euphrates valley. In their push to make a clean sweep of all non Islamic civilization, ISIS even tore down the remnants of the ancient cities of Nineveh and Palmyra. On their rubble, ISIS planned to have global Islam

triumph on this earth, in a vision its followers gleaned from a Salafist reading in the Sunni version of the Holy Scriptures.

The conflict also drew in the great powers of the United States, Russia, and Europe, which projected their forces into the Syria-Iraq space. There they linked up with the regional powers—Turkey, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. A number of local militias also joined the conflict, some of which fought on the side of the armed insurrection. Others supported the regime—Shiites from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, or Lebanon, and the Kurds pursuing their own national interests. The mushrooming of these parastatal military actors is one of the conflict's most prominent features. It also represents one of the major obstacles to reestablishing peace in the Levant.

The most ominously symbolic obstacle among them was ISIS. The caliphate it proclaimed on a vast territory lasted from 2014 to 2017, during which it stepped up terrorist acts throughout the world. Its capital of Raqqa fell on October 17, 2017, to an improbable ad hoc coalition of otherwise mutually hostile forces that had united against ISIS and its outrages. As it became the West's priority objective, the eradication of ISIS and assorted other jihadists was a game-changer. It let the West avoid the issue of Bashar al-Assad's overthrow, a perspective that had prevailed at the start of the Syrian uprising. But the West largely failed also in drawing the necessary lessons from the bankruptcy of its initial strategy. The regime, in fact, rebounded with Russian and Iranian help. The three years it took to wipe out the Islamic State and its territory caused massive damages that transformed the Levant into a field of ruins. At least 500,000 people were killed during seven years of fighting, and ten million were displaced. Of these, more than a million found refuge in Europe. There, the migrant flood set in motion the electoral rise of the extreme right. It particularly weakened the political model of the Federal Republic of Germany—the biggest EU member state—where the bulk of the Syrian refugees settled.

Because of its global reach, the conflict in the Levant could be said to constitute a kind of post-modern world war in which alliances are made, dissolved, and remade with unprecedented frequency. Putting it all in perspective is the indispensable key to understanding the lines of force running through both the confrontation but also any initiatives for emerging from the crisis and reconstructing the region. Should that happen, it will take place in a new context of weakening oil prices affecting how the

Middle East, with shrinking resources and influence, will fit into the international system.

Six years elapsed between the flowering of the Arab Spring in Syria on March 18, 2011 in Daraa, and the fall of Raqqa on October 17, 2017. Those years saw a set of democratic demands by civil society turn into a war of religions, both within Islam and against the West. It was coupled with conflicts between ethnicities that profoundly upset fragile equilibriums. Syria never experienced the moment of enthusiasm in which the middle classes joined with the working classes as was the case in Tunisia and, to some extent, in Egypt and Libya. Instead, as in Bahrain and then Yemen, the sectarian fragmentation quickly stymied the formation of a movement that might have isolated and toppled the powers-that-be. The Assad regime had the loyalty of the Alawite minority from which the ruling family came, and it was supported by the Christians, the Druze, and the Ismaelis or Shiites minorities—totaling about a fifth of the population. Part of the secularized Sunni urban bourgeoisie that had benefited from the president's economic liberalization policy also took its chances by siding with the government.

The first peaceful demonstrations, accompanied by certain Alawite and Christian intellectuals, appeared unified, but were basically made up of poor Sunni Arab youth. This circumstance was accurately documented by the geographer Fabrice Balanche (who drew the maps for this book) in his *Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War* (2018). It reflected the prolonged demographic explosion stalking the countryside, villages, and urban peripheries swollen by a rural exodus. Between 1960 and 2010, Syria grew from 4.5 to twenty-one million inhabitants. During the war years from 2011 to 2018, the population probably shrank by four to five million people, a number that combines deaths, the drop in births, and emigration. The population as of 2019 is estimated at sixteen million, and refugees at seven million.

This past half-century of exponential demographic growth especially affected the rural and tribal environments as well as the poor outskirts of Damascus, Aleppo, and Raqqa. This abundance of people were massively Sunni. Their percentage of the population grew at the expense of minorities, most notably the Alawites, many of whom were settled in Damascus by the ruling power as a sort of sectarian Praetorian guard. Their formerly heady birth rate fell as a result: the Alawite community shrank from 15 percent to 10 percent of the population in the twenty-five years leading up to the

2011 revolt. Among the Sunni, it is also important to distinguish the Arabs from the Kurds, as their political allegiances would diverge during the civil war; 65 percent of all Syrians are Sunni Arabs, while the Kurds account for 15 percent.

The Baathist regime of Hafez al-Assad had secularized the country during the three decades he was president (1971-2000), even if it was done "with a cudgel," as the late Michel Seurat put it. This contrasts with the ten years before the uprising, with his son Bashar in power, which saw Islamization spread and radicalize. In part an underground phenomenon, it presented a contradiction for those who blinkered themselves by admiring the cosmopolitan lifestyle of Syria's liberal elite. To them, young President Bashar al-Assad (who succeeded his father aged 34) seemed its personification as the new millennium dawned. Little wonder: here he was, an ophthalmologist recently returned from London with his elegant wife Asma, herself an investment banker from a Sunni bourgeoisie family from Homs.

As Thomas Pierret in his book *Religion and State in Syria: The Sunni Ulema from Coup to Revolution* (2013) showed, the rural population practiced a popular religion influenced by Sufi brotherhoods before they were uprooted and moved to the metropolis. Such networks had no function in their new, immense, informal settlements on the chaotic urban fringes. Instead, the migrants oriented themselves en masse to a rigorous Salafism, which delivered hope for salvation in the beyond through rigid, literal practice of Koranic commandments that brought some orderly views for this world and the hereafter. But for the here and now, it also preached cultural rupture with impious secularists and condemned as heretics the Alawites whose lock on power and wealth disinherited good Muslims. The regime tolerated this Salafist breeding ground so long as there was no call to violence and order was maintained, however religiously based. But jihadism took root in these downtrodden banlieues and flourished when the Americans invaded Iraq in March 2003, to occupy it until 2011.

In fact, the Syrian intelligence services secretly helped thousands of fighters rushing to join the anti-American Sunni insurrection in Iraq cross the border (where ten years later the heart of the ISIS caliphate would be located). Many jihadists came from abroad as well as from inside Syria. In hindsight, it would seem a wrongheaded policy, considering these fighters ended up massacring Iraqi Shiites supported by Iran, a reliable ally and future key supporter of Damascus, in the countryside along the border. But

the "deep state" of the *mukharabat*, the secret services hiding within the power, had an understanding with Teheran: anything that weakened the American occupying army, bloodied by terrorism in Iraq, would eventually favor Iran in getting a grip on Mesopotamia.

Also at play here was the Assad regime's desire to get rid of activists by giving them the opportunity to die in combat. The same rationale had motivated the Egyptian and Algerian regimes when they boosted the Afghan jihad in the 1980s, freeing jailed activists and putting them on a plane to Peshawar. Damascus, which had infiltrated the Salafist circles—their silent partners, their mosque networks, and more—identified the most radical local faithful and helped spirit them away to the battlefield. This arrangement received little publicity at the time. Relations with Washington still seemed good enough then, thanks to the "War on Terror" in the wake of 9/11, for any Syrian jihadists caught by the American military in Afghanistan or Pakistan to be turned over to Damascus. They were held and interrogated in the specialized prison at Sednaya, near the capital. One of the most famous of these convicts was no less than the key ideologue of third-generation jihadism, Aleppo-born Abu Musab al-Suri. Some sources claimed he was still behind bars as late as 2015. Then there was his disciple Abu Khalid al-Suri, an al-Qaeda veteran who would be freed in the fall 2011 a few months after the start of the Syrian uprising. He was destined to play a crucial role in the rebellion's jihadization.

As a quid pro quo, Bashar al-Assad would turn over to Paris any Frenchmen caught en route to Iraq. One such catch was the chief theoretician of jihad in France, Thomas Barnouin, intercepted in the company of his disciple Sabri Essid, at the Syria-Iraq border on December 12, 2006. Both men would play a pivotal role in waging terrorism in France. After serving their time in French jails, one by one they would make their way back to Syria during the civil war. The latter became infamous for a 2015 video in which he made his twelve-year-old stepson execute on the ISIS "caliphate" land an Israeli Arab accused of spying. Barnouin would be recaptured by Kurds after Raqqa fell in December 2017. Manipulating the jihadists in such a fashion during the years leading up to the insurrection would come back to haunt the Assad regime. Algeria and Egypt had found out in 1992 that their Afghanistan veterans, now fully trained and indoctrinated, came back home ready to wage jihad in their motherland. And the Syrian government's turning a blind eye to Salafism spreading among its poor youth, from Aleppo's

informal settlements to the deprived banlieues of the Damascene Ghouta, also made them more seasoned activists—until the regime switched to brutal repression and the protesters took up arms.

The spark that set off the Syrian uprising came from Daraa, the administrative center of the Hauran region in the southwest near Jabal Druze and the Jordanian border. It was a Sunni town packed with some 120,000 souls after the population explosion. In the surrounding countryside, the 500 inhabitants per square mile could not grow enough grain to feed themselves. Too many wells had exhausted the ground water reserves, and residents were unable to raise cash crops, resulting in high rural unemployment. Fewer people were emigrating to work in Lebanon, since the Syrian military had withdrawn from there in 2005 and because Lebanese salaries were too low, and this added to the ranks of the unemployed.

The uprising began innocently enough on March 6. Fifteen high school students between ten and fifteen years of age were caught daubing, "the people want the fall of the regime," on a wall. It was the slogan Al Jazeera had flashed across all television screens in the Arab world after Ben Ali's and Mubarak's ousting. The local Alawite security services arrested the boys. Around March 15 and 16, the first protest rallies of a few hundred people formed in Damascus, Aleppo, and the major towns. In Daraa, a delegation of chiefs from the boys' tribe met with the local head of the police, who was a distant relative of President al-Assad and notoriously incompetent. Just as in the case of the policewoman slapping Mohamed Bouazizi the previous December in Tunisia's Sidi Bouzid, what happened next during the interview is fuzzy. The version that got the most traction involved the police chief telling the petitioners to forget about their children, just breed more, and—if they failed—to bring their wives to the *mukhabarat* (intelligence officers) who would impregnate them.

This transpired on March 18. Touching the innermost depths of male honor, and particularly unbearable in the tribal manly culture, the insult immediately set off a demonstration in front of the governor's palace. Security forces broke it up, killing four people. The episode stirred up intense emotions throughout the country: Bashar al-Assad had to send a delegation of high party and government officials, all Daraa natives, to the town. They sacked the local authorities and had the students freed. But when several of the boys were found with evidence of torture, another demonstration ensued. It was crushed with weapons of war, even inside the

mosque that served as protest headquarters, whose blood-spattered walls were broadcast on television. Compounding the sacrilege was the fact that Alawite soldiers' boots defiled the Sunni place of worship. The Syrian uprising—the sixth uprising of the Arab Spring—thus began with the violence that symbolized the country's own contradictions. But no one could have expected the catastrophe that it would trigger, which would envelop the entire Levant and set off global repercussions. Its scale would far exceed that of the other five uprisings.

During the first weeks of spring 2011, the Assad regime seemed unsure of how to deal with the Friday upheavals. They had learned from the Egyptian experience that they would swell when the mosques emptied after prayers that day. The demonstrators chose the slogan of the week in a prior poll on a Facebook page titled "Syrian Revolution." This illustrates how involved the young people from the cosmopolitan urban middle classes were in the process from the start—just as they had been in Cairo or Tunis. Bashar al-Assad now took some conciliatory steps. On assuming power as a 34-year-old in July 2000, he had marked the occasion with a few months of political and cultural liberalization. At the time, it was called "the Damascus spring," a bittersweet expression in hindsight. However, the *mukhabarat* controlled by his father's old comrades-in-arms wasted little time in closing that window again in the summer of 2001.

Now, a decade later, Assad lifted the state of emergency, legalized membership in the Muslim Brotherhood (it had been subject to the death penalty since 1980), and authorized the wearing of the niqab (face veil) by civil servants. He raised government salaries by 30 percent, promised a multiparty system and freedom of the press, and announced some amnesties. For the most part, these measures were out of step with the accelerating demonstrations, or they had little impact beyond the initial effects of the announcement, or they were too long in coming into effect, if indeed they came at all. For a time, the changes did succeed in feeding the rumor that Bashar al-Assad was trying to assert an "open" line, like he had during the first months of his presidency against the wishes of Alawite diehards. It raised speculation that accommodation was at hand. In any event, the facts on the ground would promptly close off this option as antagonisms grew and violence spiraled.

The amnesty benefited members of Islamist groups—Muslim Brotherhood, Salafists, and jihadists, including some individuals turned over by

the Americans under their "rendition" policy. A favorite theory had Syrian intelligence, the men in the shadows who were always suspected of widespread manipulations, anticipating a quick takeover of the uprising by its most radical elements. This would make it easier for the regime to demonize the opposition. By raising the specter of extremism for the rest of the people, the regime would regain their support, among them a goodly number of Sunni.

This was precisely the strategy of the Egyptian General Staff at the time. As confirmed to me personally by one of its members in December 2011 (see p. 135), the plan was to let the Muslim Brotherhood walk away with the elections, but only to better expose its fatuousness and thus torpedo President Morsi before ousting him in July 2013. But Egypt was not as fragmented as Syria along sectarian lines, and its ruling power was not identified with a religious minority against which the Sunni majority could mount an armed insurrection. Stigmatizing the Syrian rebellion would be a drawn-out, complex process. Its full impact would only be felt after ISIS emerged and started its all-out terrorism campaign in 2014.

In August 2011, the daily demonstrations during the month of Ramadan failed to force the regime to give in. It had already stifled any attempt to create the equivalent of a Tahrir Square anywhere in Damascus. More than a thousand civilians had been killed in the repression, along with some members of the security forces. The fighting increasingly shifted to areas densely populated by the Sunni or parts of the Mediterranean coast they shared with Alawites. These included most notably Lattakia or Banias, but also Homs, a city characterized by its sectarian mix that sat at the crossroads between the coast and Damascus. The first great battle of the war would be fought here in the autumn of 2011.

The opposition's militarization began in July, with appeals to Sunni officers and soldiers who refused to fire on the demonstrators to desert. One of these officers announced the creation of the Free Syrian Army. At first, the communiqués circulated as online videos showed captains or lieutenant colonels, careful of their appearance, freshly shaved and mustachioed, voicing nationalist sentiments denouncing the repression and the dictatorship. They would form the backbone of a Syrian opposition on which rested all the hopes of the "Friends of Syria," a global coalition that France and the United States set about organizing. Its first meeting in Tunis on February 23, 2012 brought together 114 states eager

to support a democratic transition from the Bashar al-Assad regime—before that coalition fell apart.

In October 2012, I met two officers who had deserted, one in Istanbul, the other in Antioch. I then secretly crossed the Turkish-Syrian border to visit the village of Khirbet al-Joz, from which the Syrian army had been driven two days earlier. The two military men, one of whom was the Free Syrian Army commander for the Aleppo sector controlled by the rebels since the previous July 19, professed their non-sectarian faith in democracy while criticizing the regime's despotism. The villagers I interviewed that day echoed these sentiments. However, the videos of the village's liberation streaming on the web showed Salafist groups in the attack. There was no trace of them in the daily life of the countryside during my stay. But within months, first the Islamists and then the jihadist dimension took over. They marginalized the secular forces supported by Western democrats still attached to the notion of freedom when, in fact, the Arab Spring was already obsolescing. At least, the West clung to the fleeting ideal of a democratic uprising until the proclamation of the Islamic State in June 2014, followed by three years of the ISIS caliphate. Before its destruction in 2017, it would capture the image of the uprising and transform it into a global terror of apocalyptic proportions.

The Iraqi Factory of Syria's Jihadism

In August 2011, the month of the Ramadan fast—a time of heightened public displays of piety and of mobilizing the community of the faithful—the situation in Syria by global jihadism standards looked promising. So much so, in fact, that the head of the "Islamic State of Iraq" (ISI), Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the future "caliph" of ISIS who was still an unknown then, sent a mission into Syria to scout the terrain for setting up a branch. The researcher Charles Lister in his book *The Syrian Jihad* (2015) documented in detailed fashion that the mission was led by Abu Mohammad al-Julani, until then the ISI "emir of Nineveh province" in northern Iraq.

This mysterious Syrian, whose nom de guerre and demonym (Julani) referred to the Golan, would not reveal his identity until July 2016, when he appeared on-screen with his face uncovered for the first time. He was born in 1984 as Ahmed Hussein al-Shara in Daraa, the town located at the

foot of the Golan that triggered the Syrian uprising in March 2011. He would crisscross Syria on his scouting trip, setting up a network of contacts and recruits. This would precede the future development of jihad in that country and its interaction with neighboring Iraq. Further, it foreshadowed the rupture of the international Islamist movement between al-Qaeda, directed from the Afghan-Pakistan border region by Ayman al-Zawahiri (Osama bin Laden having just been killed, on May 2, 2011 in Abbottabad, Pakistan), and ISIS under the Iraqi leadership of al-Baghdadi.

The special nature of contemporary jihadism in Iraq had a decisive effect on the evolution of its Syrian equivalent: it would set its cross-border dimension, attracting tens of thousands of foreign fighters with its dark messianism. It was born of the Sunni resistance to the American invasion of March 2003, eight years of occupation, and, finally, the passing of political power in Baghdad to the Shiite majority supported by Iran. As discussed above, the Jordanian Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a veteran of Afghanistan, had founded a group named *Jam'at al-Tawhid wal Jihad* (Group of Unity and Jihad—or JTJ) in Iraq. The first term in its name echoed the heart of Salafist doctrine: the concept of divine unity understood as an uncompromising monotheism opposed to all popular devotions, to Shiism, and to Christianity.

The group quickly became known for spectacular suicide attacks against American forces, their local collaborators, and international institutions. One after the other, JTJ targeted the Jordanian embassy (August 7, 2003), despite Jordan's king having pardoned an imprisoned al-Zarqawi in 1999; the UN's offices (August 12), killing the Special Representative Sergio Vieira di Mello; and then the Imam Ali mosque (August 29) in the holy city of Najaf, killing ninety-five people including the Ayatollah Baqir al-Hakim. In al-Zarqawi's declarations and acts, hatred of the Shiites had taken on an overriding importance. It would be the distinctive marker for all the organizations which followed in JTJ's wake until ISIS. The following year, in May 2004, al-Zarqawi became infamous around the world for the first online beheading video of an American hostage, Nicholas Berg, whom his killers dressed in an orange overall like the detainees at Guantanamo. This operating mode would be pushed to an awful climax ten years later, as ISIS spread its reach from Raqqa to Mosul.

This new-found notoriety led al-Zarqawi's local group to merge with bin Laden's multinational one, even though al-Qaeda did not have the same

anti-Shiite obsession. When al-Zarqawi swore allegiance to bin Laden in September 2004, "Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia" was born. The merger only added to the fame of both the subsidiary and the parent. However, the indiscriminate massacres of Shiites to foment a civil war from which the jihadists would emerge victorious did not fit bin Laden's and al-Zawahiri's strategy. They were more interested in targeted, explicitly political attacks on governments. This would become a major bone of contention between the second-generation jihadism of al-Qaeda and the third-generation jihadism of ISIS. The latter would be represented both by its Iraq-Levant incarnation under the leadership of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and in the export of terrorism to Europe inspired by Abu Musab al-Suri's *Call to Global Islamic Resistance*. In 2005, al-Zawahiri reprimanded al-Zarqawi in a letter that was intercepted and made public. Al-Zarqawi ignored the reproach, feeling safe in his powerful role.

In January 2006, al-Zarqawi merged five other armed Iraqi groups into his movement. Their rosters included recycled Baathist officers who brought military skills and intelligence with them. The new grouping was named *Majliss Shoura al-Moujahidin* (Mujahideen Shura Council) with no mention of al-Qaeda in its name, even though the relationship had not yet been severed officially. The following June 7, al-Zarqawi was killed in an American strike, but by then he had expanded his sway over large parts of Sunni Iraq.

In October, his successor Abu Ayyub al-Masri announced yet another name change to the Islamic State in Iraq (*Al-Dawla al-Islamiyya fi Iraq*). This was the first use of the term "state" (*dawla*) to designate a jihadist organization. As the Arabist researcher William McCants points out in his book *The ISIS Apocalypse* (2015), the word has a double meaning in archaic Arabic. Originally, it meant "revolution," as used by the Abbasids in the mid-eighth century when they established their caliphate in Baghdad. It referred to the politico-religious uprising that they started in Iraq, with the aim of toppling the Ummayad dynasty in Damascus in the name of a purified Islam. Eventually, *dawla* came to define the state that emerged from this revolution, which is the accepted meaning of the word in modern Arabic.

But for the jihadists with their keen interest in an ideological reading of Muslim history, the term is charged with both meanings. Hence, in 2006, in videos imitating a television newscast, the masked presenters would announce the names of the ministers of the "Islamic State in Iraq," as well as the organization's territorial ambitions. They intended to spread their

reach all the way to Palestine by annihilating the Israeli "Zionist entity," to the Levant by wiping out all the states created by the colonial British and French League of Nations mandates—Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan—and then on to the Arabian Peninsula, where they would destroy the "cardboard states" of the Gulf Cooperation Council subservient to the United States. These declarations in effect mingled the ancient spirit of the Abbasid Revolution and its territorial conquests with today's geography.

This first caliphal project, which no one took seriously at the time, but which ISIS would realize in 2014, presupposed the crowning of a "commander of believers." This mantle fell on the shoulders of Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, an unremarkable Iraqi ex-gendarme and computer technician. But he came from the tribal lineage of the Qurayshis to which the Prophet belonged, and so Abu Ayyub al-Masri (himself an Egyptian commoner) swore allegiance to him. The honorific demonym (*laqab*) "al-Baghdadi" ("the one from Baghdad")—which his successor Abu Bakr would keep—obviously refers to the capital of modern Iraq, which the jihadists wanted to free from American occupation and Shiite domination. But it can also mean the city in Abbasid times, saying in effect that the fundamentalist dogma founded there was coming into its own again. To highlight this inspiration, the *dawla* chose as its emblem the black flag of the Abbasid dynasty stamped with the Prophet's seal and with the Islamic profession of faith emblazoned on it in white Kufic script. This is the most ancient form of Arabic calligraphy, and it symbolizes the original purity of the message. A hadith found in the collection of the traditionist Imam al-Tirmidhi (824–892) moreover requires that "the black banners will come from Khorasan [a region that included today's Afghanistan], nothing will make them turn back until they are planted in Jerusalem." This hadith is abundantly cited in jihadist literature as a portent of Israel's impending destruction.

The Salafist extremist vision of this "revolution-state" would apply sharia in its full rigor in the territories under its control. This meant massacring Shiites and Yazidis and imposing the head tax (*jiziya*) on Christians. It alienated a certain number of Iraqi Sunni tribes whose sons were also killed if they refused to swear allegiance. As we saw earlier (p. 90), the American generals David Petraeus and John R. Allen seized this opportunity to foment a vast collaborationist movement among the tribes. They called it the *Sahwa* ("Awakening"), and it was financed by the United States. Bin Laden severely criticized Abu Ayyub for his poor politico-military management of the *dawla*.

He thought that Abu Ayyub and the "commander of the faithful" were wrong in their irresponsible excesses—or Kharijism—and were damaging the jihadist cause.

By 2009, the territory of "the state" had contracted to the northern province of Nineveh and its administrative center Mosul, a massively Sunni city. Still, powerful terrorist attacks in the form of suicide bombings on government or Shiite targets in Baghdad continued. On October 10, 2010, the "commander of the faithful"—Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, along with his vizier Abu Ayyub al-Masri—was killed in an American raid. Most cadres of the "Islamic State of Iraq" were captured and imprisoned at Camp Bucca—which they used as a management workshop to help bind the organization together.

It was from this prison population that Ibrahim Awad Ibrahim Ali al-Badri, a.k.a. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was chosen as Abu Omar's successor. Born in July 1971 in Samarra, a former student of sharia and a Salafist preacher, he was described as unremarkable, if not colorless, by those who knew him. He joined the Sunni rebellion after the American invasion of March 2003, only to be arrested in January 2004. He spent ten months in Camp Bucca before being released as a "low-level threat." He then became integrated in al-Zarqawi's group through the course of its successive mutations, until on May 16, 2010 he became its leader. He would stay in the job for a decade, until an American raid killed him in Syria's Idlib province, near the Turkish border, on October 26, 2019 at the age of 48. The *dawla's* éminence grise, Haji Bakr, formerly a colonel in Saddam Hussein's secret services, promoted him to this post.

Salafization of the Revolt and Western Blindness

The propagation of the Syrian jihad that would end in ISIS thus was born of the Iraqi transplant grafted on by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Its unfolding is a complex story, because Abu Bakr's scout in August 2011, the Syrian Abu Mohammad al-Julani, would declare independence from his mentor once he was implanted in his native country. All the while, the international contest for dominance between al-Zawahiri and al-Baghdadi continued. In late summer 2011, as the Syrian uprising swung into armed insurrection, its Western supporters were willfully blind to these growing Salafist and

jihadist aspects. They clung to transhistoric comparisons instead—clichés like, "Syria is our Spanish Civil War." A similar reading would dominate the analysis of the rebellion in Washington under Barack Obama's presidency as much as in Paris under François Hollande's. This lapse goes to the heart of a much wider debate on blanking out the dynamics of Islamism.

Influenced by the researcher Olivier Roy, Hollande gave precedence to "the Islamization of radicality" instead of "the radicalization of Islam." In other words, jihadism came to be considered a contingent and superficial phenomenon. However, this principled position fails in its misunderstanding the political and religious sociology of contemporary Islam. This is due to its principal academic champions knowing neither the Arabic language nor Arab culture. The blind spot was that the war in Syria, having mutated into the jihad of Shām, resulted in intense infighting over who would dominate Islam, locally and internationally. This conflict of an unheard-of violence within Sunnism compounded the growth in power and mutual competition between the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafists, and jihadists. Thanks to the heightened confrontation with Shiism, the process ended up marginalizing the Brothers because they were more disposed to accommodate this doctrine, to the benefit of Salafists-jihadists unwilling to compromise with it. But it was the latters' extremism that would eventually overextend the messianic and apocalyptic ISIS caliphate that existed from 2014 to 2017, precipitating its end.

Nevertheless, the Western leaders—and the experts who advised them—simply did not want to see what was in play in the quest for dominating global Islam. That is, not until the attacks by ISIS in Europe forced the West to take the fight to Islamic State's territory. Not only did they fail to analyze the transformations of the Muslim world, but they were unprepared for the onslaught on their home ground that left European societies vulnerable to jihadist violence. Unintentionally, the West also reinforced the strategy of the Syrian president whose downfall they wanted to see. Al-Assad would instead emerge strengthened from the war in 2017, aided by his Russian and Iranian allies—and with his Western adversaries throwing in the towel.

The rebellion was in fact split from the beginning by ideological struggles among a broad spectrum of players ranging from democrats to jihadists. In-country, the democrats put themselves under the leadership of the Free Syrian Army, and abroad they referenced diverse bodies

composed of exiles, starting with the not-very-influential Istanbul-based Syrian National Council. On November 11, 2012, in Doha, Qatar, the Friends of Syria convinced it to merge into a "National Coalition." It rapidly fell prey to internal squabbles over who would call the shots for the coalition, pitting Qatar and Turkey, which backed the Muslim Brotherhood, against Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates who were hostile toward it.

In the other Arab countries going through uprisings, the Islamist movements of various stripes turned insurrectional dynamics to their own advantage. This held for Syria as well, where in 2012 the armed groups' needle started moving toward the Salafists and jihadists, buttressed by huge funding coming from rich like-minded Sunni individuals in the Arabian peninsula, aided by spillover from the al-Zarqawi-inspired Sunni insurgency in Iraq. Simultaneously, the estrangement of fighters on the ground from the authorities in exile grew, fed by the resentment that men risking their lives naturally harbored toward negotiators safe in the ballrooms of grand international hotels. Lastly, the role played by foreign support for the rebellion made it evolve in line with the financial flows from the Arabian Peninsula. Most observers estimate the total at over a billion dollars per year. On the one hand, some foreign supporters favored groups that more or less closely lined up behind the Muslim Brotherhood, all the way to the brigades inspired by al-Qaeda. Those benefited especially from Qatar's largesse and a privileged status on the Al Jazeera network.

On the other hand, the more explicitly Salafist groups were regarded as a bulwark against the Shiite expansion into the Levant. The enormous funds showered on them, in stark contrast to the poverty of the Free Syrian Army, resulted in the most seasoned FSA fighters defecting starting in 2012 because the Salafists paid more and provided better weapons. Finally, reinforcements of their regime enemies from Shia Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, and—from 2013 on—from Lebanese Hezbollah especially, radicalized the conflict even more in sectarian terms. Damascus, in the end, would turn this to its advantage.

The battle for Homs lasted from the fall of 2011 until spring 2012 and ended with government forces retaking Baba Amr, the main insurgent district. The battle augured the turn the war would take over the next five years. Syria's third-largest city, Homs, sat on the road connecting Damascus and the Alawite coast, the Assad family's heartland and original base of support. Known as Emesa in antiquity, this strategic crossroads city also

commanded the north–south axis between Damascus and Aleppo. It had a majority Sunni population, but large parts of the outskirts were inhabited by Alawites. Located close to Lebanon's Sunni-populated border area of Akkar, in the early days of the insurgency Homs was one of its major resupply channels for arms bought in Central Europe or the Balkans from stockpiles of the former Warsaw Pact. The Al Farooq main rebel brigade—named in honor of Caliph Omar, a Sunni hero, despised by the Shiites (as we saw earlier in Bahrain)—was commanded by officer-deserters.

The brigade's first video broadcast dwelled on its democratic uprising against a dictatorial regime. This also emerges from the story told by the writer Jonathan Littell, recipient of the 2006 Goncourt Prize, in his work *Syrian Notebooks: Inside the Homs Uprising*, published in English in 2015. Littell lived in one of the rebel districts during the battle for Homs. However, over time, it was possible to detect from the contents of his reporting and the allegiances of the fighters (whose beards kept getting longer) the shift into a more Salafist register. It blended disappointment with the West—for failing to provide hoped-for air strikes to support the insurrection à la Libya—with massive Salafist financial support, particularly from Kuwait.

The first suicide bombing was carried out on December 23, 2011 against a building in Damascus housing the intelligence services. It was claimed the following January 23 by the Al-Nusra Front. This was the armed jihadist group formed in October 2011 by Abu Mohammad al-Julani after his August scouting mission to Syria. With this attack, he imported action methods from Iraq to the Syrian conflict. The complete name of the group "Front of support (*nusra*) for the people of Shām by the fighters (*mujahideen*) of Shām in the land of jihad" reveals its origins, if nothing else by being redundant: "the Islamic State in Iraq" of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. As part of expanding his project to the Levant, al-Baghdadi lent his "support" to the rebellion in Syria so that it might tilt the region as a whole into the "land of jihad."

The Arabic title of the Front's online site, *al-manara al-bayda*, stems from the prophetic tales of the coming of Jesus as Muslim messiah via that "white minaret" of the Grand Mosque in Damascus. From there, he will lead the final attack against evil, ending with the planet submitting to the true religion. It therefore captured the centrality that Syria and its capital (which, in Arabic, are both called al-Shām, by substitution, as is the Levant as a whole) represent for global jihad. Here we have the first significant instance of this apocalyptic theme being applied to the Syrian battlefield.

It would be a powerful lure for tens of thousands of jihadists from the world over. The video of January 23, 2012 also sets the objective of establishing an Islamic State in Syria, using the standard terminology employed by al-Qaeda, to which the Al-Nusra Front owes its allegiance, just like Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and ISI did before the split the following year. In addition, a growing number of Salafist brigades combined local implantation and social networking in a frantic competition for the money pouring in from the Arabian Peninsula. One of them even took the name of a famous Kuwaiti sheikh with similar leanings in gratitude for his generosity.

2012 saw the growing Salafization of the rebellion and its gradual absorption into a regional logic. Starting from the lines of conflict in Iraq, it became part and parcel of the confrontation between the Shiite and Sunni axes. At first, the exile organizations were in a state of denial about the trend. They feared alienating Western supporters and handing the Damascus regime potent propaganda fodder for demonizing its enemies. But on the ground, the flood of money from the Gulf as much as the Salafists' and jihadist fighters' religious zeal for martyrdom combined to darken the military picture for the Assad regime. Meanwhile, desertions from the infantry manned by Sunni conscripts and officers escalated, and the fighting power of the Damascus forces began to melt away. On July 19, the rebellion, dominating the disenfranchised districts, took Aleppo East, a major urban center and economic capital filled with rural migrants. And the poor outskirts of Damascus, shabby with makeshift dwellings and rebar rising from what was once the storied oasis of Ghouta, celebrated in classic Arab poetry as a vision of paradise on earth, also fell to the insurrection. In the pivotal years 2012 and 2013, in the face of the regime's setbacks, Hezbollah units began arriving from Lebanon for support on the ground. Its planners concealed the flow until the funerals of combat casualties, celebrated as martyrs, exposed it to public view in the spring of 2013.

But even this was not enough to turn the tide in favor of Bashar al-Assad, as the rebels kept ratcheting up the pressure on the capital. However, there would soon be a major turning point in the conflict. On August 12, 2013, regime forces released sarin gas over several Ghouta locations, claiming at least a thousand victims, many of them civilians, including children. This atrocity defied President Obama's warning on July 12 that the regime would cross a "red line" if it used chemical weapons. Their punishment should have come in the form of Western air strikes.

Six days after the sarin attack, François Hollande was ready to send in the French air force. However, the British parliament turned down Prime Minister David Cameron's pleas for authorizing air strikes. The lies about WMDs in Iraq, supposedly stockpiled by Saddam Hussein, told by the previous prime minister Tony Blair to justify British intervention in Iraq were still present in Westminster's memory. Adding to Parliament's mistrust of Cameron's intentions was the debacle in the aftermath of bombing Libya in 2011, which saw the country descend into murderous anarchy after the tyrant's demise.

As for President Obama, he reneged on his "red line" warning, punting the issue to a reluctant Congress on September 9. The upshot: no action taken. It was a clear Western retreat that isolated France diplomatically after it had been in the front lines urging the immediate overthrow of Bashar al-Assad. Russia lost no time stepping up to take full advantage of this Western foot dragging. On that same September 9, Russia offered to work jointly with the Syrian regime under UN auspices to destroy its chemical weapons arsenal. Given the military deadlock, the international community had little choice but to line up behind the Russian proposal. It was ratified by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and American Secretary of State John Kerry in an agreement signed on September 14 in Geneva. With that, Russia took the initiative for good in the Syrian civil war.

It was a clear diplomatic success for the Kremlin, the first of many. Its decision-making process was based on analyses by Russian Oriental-studies scholars who knew the Levant better than the self styled experts the European and American leaders relied on. In the fall of 2014, in Moscow, I had the opportunity to meet Yevgeny Primakov, formerly the director of Moscow's Institute of Oriental Studies. Later he went on to head the intelligence service and then served a brief stint as prime minister in 1998–1999. Primakov who, until his death in June 2015, had Vladimir Putin's ear, told me that the strategy was one of defending Russian credibility. They aimed to do so by taking a role in restoring international legitimacy to its ally Syria by dismantling the chemical weapons under a UN mandate. This would eliminate any risk of the West intervening militarily and putting a thumb on the scale on the side of the rebellious democratic forces.

This insight helped to bring the conflict into sharp relief: the insurgents, taken hostage by global jihadism, would be the object of rising Western suspicion. A Russian-Iranian axis could take the gloves off in Syria—precisely

what Moscow did starting in September 2015. As for the fate of President al-Assad, it would be subordinated to Mr. Putin's interests.

This was the context for the accelerating growth of jihadism. It manifested in the massive influx of foreign fighters, particularly a European contingent intent on making up for their respective countries' failure to step up in aid of the opposition. This new stage was also marked by jihadism's ultimate radicalization. Nothing illustrates it better than the split between the Al-Nusra Front and its ISI mentor. It widened with the proclamation on April 8, 2013 of the "Islamic State in Iraq and Shām (Levant)"—called Daesh after its Arabic acronym, but known as ISIS or ISIL in English-speaking countries. ISIS achieved media supremacy over the rest of the rebellion when it trotted out its "caliphate" in Mosul on June 29, 2014. For the next three years, until the fall of its capital Raqqa on October 17, 2017, it would control a vast territory, from which it would spread terrorism to Europe. It was against ISIS that Western military intervention would finally be directed from the summer of 2015 onwards—not against the regime in Damascus, as François Hollande had wanted in August 2013.

The Rupture in Jihad's Core

The split in the jihadist camp can be dated to April 2013. The Al-Nusra Front had never officially acknowledged that it was a creation of the Islamic State in Iraq. That way it could blend more easily with the Syrian insurrectional fabric that it had in fact become very deeply entwined with. It fought many battles in coalition with other Salafist and jihadist brigades of various shades, but also with ones that still claimed to adhere to the Free Syrian Army. Rebel fighters at the time were divided among some 1,500 more or less autonomous units.

Al-Julani had prioritized the shared fight against the Assad regime over ideological differences. His allegiance to al-Qaeda and its chief Ayman al-Zawahiri did not raise many objections in the rest of the rebellion. This might have been because the multinational jihadist organization, since its leader bin Laden's elimination two years earlier, had atrophied. Its Syrian branch was lying low primarily out of local strategic considerations. It made itself popular by providing municipal services structured on sharia in areas under its control, from garbage pickup to public transport. Al-Julani gave

some interviews on Al Jazeera to two journalists close to the Muslim Brotherhood and not very critical of him—the Syrian-Spanish Tayseer Allouni in December 2013 and the Egyptian Ahmed Mansour on May 27, 2015.

On April 7, 2013, al-Zawahiri addressed a message of encouragement to the Al-Nusra Front, assuring it that "its sacred fight ends with a jihadist Islamic State establishing the divine sharia." This message can be construed as an attempt by the aging Egyptian al-Qaeda chief and Bin Laden successor to assert his continuing global authority from his mountainous hideout in the region between Afghanistan and Pakistan. On April 8, as if in response, his young rival Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi let it be known in a discourse that Al-Nusra was simply an extension of ISI, and that both had been authorized to merge into a single organization named "Islamic State in Iraq and in the Shām" (*Al-Dawla al-Islamiyya fīl Iraq wash Shām*).

The acronym "Daesh," calling to mind with its distinctively unharmonious sound the Arabic word *daes*, which means "to trample," immediately went viral and became the Arabic signifier for this world-shaking group. The name stuck even after Islamic State mandated the use of its official title once the caliphate was up and running. Its followers refused to use "Daesh" because it struck them as limiting, if not pejorative. They preferred the single word "State" (*Dawla*) with its revolutionary connotations harking back to Abbasid days. Analysts of the ISIS phenomenon, however, would continue to use Daesh (in Arabic or French) and ISIS/ISIL (in English) to highlight its singular nature. Meanwhile, al-Julani in Syria rejected the merger and dropping of the "Al-Nusra Front" name, which he expressed in a recording that was broadcast on April 10. In it, he solemnly repledged his allegiance to al-Zawahiri, a connection that had become less burdensome than Baghdadi's aggressive tutelage, which complicated al-Julani's relations with the other factions of the Syrian rebellion.

But the emergence of ISIS coincided with an itch for excess that had built up in one part of the Syrian Salafist-jihadist side, and a large number of fighters joined the new organization, inflicting some drastic manpower cuts on the Al-Nusra Front. Among the foreigners, who cared little about the local power balances, this was especially the case with the Chechens, known for their bloody extremism. They were joined by most of the European jihadists, who came to Shām in search of a kind of messianic utopianism marked by fanatical attachment to an ideology. They were indifferent to the realities of the Syrian territory and populace.

ISIS initially manifested itself in Raqqa, the first prefecture to fall into the hands of the rebellion on March 6, 2013, chosen for its symbolic value. Its brigades started a reign of terror there on May 14, when the first video bearing the ISIS logo was disseminated. It showed the public execution of three men on the town's main traffic circle on Naim Square, each shot in the head. That set the tone for a repetitive series of horrific images that would follow for four years, making up the group's distinct signature. By mid-January 2014, it had gained full control of the Raqqa urban center on the Euphrates River by killing or chasing the other groups out. Emptied of their middle-class owners, spacious apartments were redistributed to the foreign fighters who had arrived knowing only cheap public housing in the European banlieues.

For propaganda purposes, Raqqa was hyped as the intersection of jihadism's virtual as well as earthly utopia. It was painted in the colors of a happy city abiding by sharia, where life went by the rhythm of bathing in the Euphrates river and meting out Koranic punishments to offenders. Crucified corpses and cut-off heads were exhibited on the city square, between raids to massacre nonbelievers and apostates and expand the land of authentic Islam. The attractive power of ISIS's fanatical sectarianism furnished a heroic outlet better adapted to the mass of international jihad sympathizers than the alliances of the Al-Nusra Front with other Syrian insurgents.

The military and political situation fed the escalating violence and its extremist excesses. When the rebels took Raqqa in March 2013 and ISIS started its executions, the Sunni defense of Al-Qusayr near the Syria-Lebanon borders was about to fall to Hezbollah. It was in besieging this town sitting astride the Damascus-Aleppo highway that Hezbollah's fighters were seen in broad daylight for the first time in the Syrian conflict. That stimulated vengeful fatwas from key globalized Sunni ulemas. From Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi on Al Jazeera to the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, religious leaders across the region called for global jihad to liberate the Al-Qusayr from "the enemy." A scant seven years earlier, Al Jazeera had sung the praises of the "party of God" (word for word: *Hezb Allah*) and its Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah (whose name means "divine victory" in Arabic). This was during the "33-Day War" in the summer of 2006, when Hezbollah defeated the Israeli army in South Lebanon. Now it was being called the "party of Satan" on these same media outlets. Seasoned in combat against the Jewish

state's soldiers, Hezbollah fighters defeated the Sunni rebels, which surrendered Al-Qusayr on June 4, 2013. With the Middle East in full-fledged chaos, the rubble left by the shattering of all certainties furnished an ideal environment for ISIS. By its outrageousness and its simplified vision of good and evil, it would transcend the old ideologies with their incomprehensible reversals.

In the days following the fall of Al-Qusayr, al-Julani and al-Zawahiri exchanged some messages. The al-Qaeda leader reiterated his confidence in the Al-Nusra Front—and the Islamic State in Iraq—but rejected merging the two entities into ISIS. He also named Abu Khalid al-Suri his representative in Shām. After he was liberated from Sednaya prison, where he had been incarcerated with Abu Musab al-Suri, in the summer of 2011, Abu Khalid had rejoined the *Ahrar al-Shām* ("The freemen of the Shām") brigade. He helped guide this "free" Salafist group, by now militarily one of the most powerful in the rebellion, to wage jihad on the Afghan model. Abu Khalid would function as the "sage of jihad," and nip in the bud a devastating *fitna* (sedition) between "brothers."

However, at the same time, Hassan Aboud, the leader of Ahrar al-Shām who had welcomed Abu Khalid into his ranks, was the host on Al Jazeera for a big interview. Immediately afterward, in June 2013, the last month that Mohamed Morsi was still president of Egypt, Aboud went to Cairo. He gave a talk in the name of the Syrian insurrection sponsored by an association of ulemas led by Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi. The sheikh was marshaling his forces to save the Muslim Brother Morsi from the Tamarrod ("rebellion") movement that had taken to the street to overthrow him with the discreet support of the military top brass.

This signaled the coming together of the Egyptian Brothers, of Qatar via Al Jazeera, of al-Qaradawi, and of a nebulous Syrian "moderate jihadists," whom the others would promote henceforth around the Al-Nusra Front and the Ahrar al-Shām. But these subtle realignments, which shifted the "moderation" needle toward al-Qaeda, were not enough to dampen the appeal of ISIS. Spellbound recruits coming from all the Islamist brigades kept flocking to it. For them, al-Zawahiri belonged to the past; the Muslim Brotherhood and Al Jazeera were nothing but heretics and henchmen of the West. Abu Khalid was killed on February 23, 2014 by one of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's assassins in a warning to his opponents within the jihadist movement tempted to take a less ultra line.

From the autumn of 2013, ISIS bursting onto the battlefield turned the equation of the conflict on its head. It paralleled the entry into the fight of growing numbers of foreign Shiite paramilitaries that would furnish the bulk of the regime ground offensives needed to retake the areas in insurgent hands. The UN accord on the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons in September had signaled the West's unwillingness to move militarily against Damascus. As for the "traditional rebels," from the survivors of the Free Syrian Army to the Salafists, and the "moderate jihadists" of Al-Nusra, they would henceforth have to fight on two fronts: against Damascus, but also against ISIS, which was committed to annihilating its rivals.

The United States and its allies among the oil monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula tried hard to strengthen the opponents of ISIS. Of course, all the while they would have to worry about American weaponry falling into the hands of ISIS, either by defections or by the "good rebels" being defeated. The feeble belligerence between the regime and ISIS also raised numerous questions. In northeast Syria, ISIS grabbed all the oil wells, colluding with most of the local tribes, and trucked the oil to neighboring Turkey for sale at an attractive price that assured comfortable royalties.

Although Bashar al-Assad's air force ruled the skies, these convoys were never bombed. As seen from Damascus, ISIS in effect offered the prospect of fighting a fratricidal war against the other rebels, dividing the insurrection deeply. It recalls the strategy employed by the Algerian generals, also advised by Russian intelligence officers during the 1990s. The ruling power in Algiers took advantage of reciprocal massacres between the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS) and the Armed Islamic Group (GIA). The beheadings and multiple atrocities committed by both sides had made them bogeymen, making the military brass look respectable by comparison. This same dynamic worked even better for the Syrian regime; thanks to the immense publicity generated by the execution videos ISIS disseminated over social media, which had been nonexistent twenty years earlier in Algeria, international attention focused on crimes against humanity committed by the jihadist organization, rather than by the Assad men.

On 7 January 2014, the new spokesman for ISIS in Syria, Abu Mohammad al-Adnani, born 1977 in the Idlib area and trained by al-Zarqawi in Iraq, called *takfir*—or excommunication—against the members of other rebel groups that were not overtly jihadist. It made spilling their blood "licit" without need for any sort of trial. The violence between insurgents reached

its high point in northwest Syria in the early months of this year. After internecine fighting that left thousands dead, ISIS was run out of many localities where rival brigades were equipped with American weapons. The jihadist forces regrouped along the border with Turkey, which was a crucial crossing point for foreigners joining the fight, and in the Euphrates valley between Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor toward the Iraqi border.

* * *

In both sectors, ISIS hurled itself against an enemy strongly supported by the West but also by Russia: the YPG militias ("People's Protection Units"), the military arm of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD). They had been formed in July 2011 in the Rojava region (or South Kurdistan) located in northern Syria and abandoned by the Damascus troops. The PYD was the Syrian offshoot of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) of Turkey, an independence movement with a Marxist tinge whose founder, Abdullah Öcalan, the Turks had imprisoned on Imrali Island in the Sea of Marmara since 1999. The PYD thus was both anti-Ankara and anti-jihadist. With several dozen thousand fighters, including the women's brigades (YPJ or "Women's Protection Units"), the YPG militias boosted their standing by defeating the Al-Nusra Front and Ahrar al-Shām. In 2014, it was the main force blocking ISIS from expanding into northern Syria, with its resupply routes bringing men and material from Turkey. The Kurds' impregnable strategic position continuously stymied the Islamic State from the time it formed the caliphate in June 2014.

Proclaiming the Caliphate

The fighting during the first half of 2014 led up to the proclamation of the ISIS caliphate. It was the most spectacular event in the history of international jihadism since the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington. On June 10, 2014, ISIS forces took Mosul. The organization had sunk deep roots there during the al-Zarqawi era, and government troops fled without a fight. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi inherited the weapons stockpiles left behind by the United States, allowing him to launch a veritable blitzkrieg toward Baghdad by way of Tikrit and Samarra, a majority Sunni area.

ISIS exploited the immense resentment the Samarra population harbored toward the policies of the Shiite prime minister Nouri al-Maliki. He had marginalized the Sunni, making it easier for them to sympathize with any movement, however extreme, that fought in the name of their sect. Shiite soldiers who had fled from ISIS forces were captured and butchered by the thousands. A lightning advance into Nineveh toward Erbil, capital of the Iraqi Kurd autonomous region, forced an exodus of Christians and Yazidis. Condemned as *kuffar* (nonbelievers), the Yazidi men were killed, their women and children sold into slavery. Finally, some of the enormous inventory of American military hardware recovered in Mosul was transported to the Syrian front. There it helped ISIS conquer a vast territory along the Euphrates, save for a few pockets held on to by al-Assad's army. On June 11, ISIS formally took over the Turkish consulate general in Mosul, captured its diplomats, hauled down the Turkish flag, and replaced it with the ominous ISIS banner. With that, everything was set for a new caliphate to succeed the Ottoman caliphate, abolished ninety years earlier in 1924 by Turkish President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

The actual proclamation came on June 29, a symbolic date marking the start of Ramadan that year. A first ISIS video broadcast over social media, titled "The end of Sykes-Picot," showed a Palestinian jihadist from Chile demolishing a checkpoint on the Syria-Iraq border. Addressing all the world's Muslims—even those on South America's Pacific coast—ISIS proclaimed itself the true champion of the fight against the prior century's European colonialism. However, part of its mission was battling the nationalist Arab regimes that had retained the "illegitimate" borders drawn in London and Paris on May 19, 1916, known as the Sykes-Picot agreement between British Foreign Secretary Sir Mark Sykes and his French colleague Georges Picot to break up the Community of the Faithful. ISIS now controlled a territory stretching nearly 435 miles from east to west on both sides of the former Syria-Iraq frontier line. With a population of eight to ten million at its peak, it would objectify the goal set in 2006 by the "Islamic State in Iraq" (ISI) for Sunni domination of the Shām. With that, the prophecy that a Sunni caliphate would start the conquest of the world and subject all of it to Islam would be fulfilled.

That same day, Abu Mohammad al-Adnani, the ISIS spokesman, announced in a recording that "the sun of jihad has risen" over the earth. This meant that the organization had proclaimed the caliphate with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi at

its head, to whom the planet's Muslims owed the oath of allegiance (*bayʾa*). With that, the old name of "Islamic State in Iraq and the Shām (Levant)" was replaced by "Islamic State" full stop, manifesting the worldwide ambitions of the new entity. Five days later, on Friday, July 4, al-Baghdadi, dressed in black in the tradition of the Abbasid dynasty in Baghdad (but with a Rolex on his wrist), was filmed giving a sermon in Mosul's al-Nuri mosque. It had been built in 1172 by the Emir Nour al-Din al-Zenki, the unifier of Syria and a merciless jihadist against the Crusaders. Referred to as "Caliph Ibrahim" (both al-Baghdadi's birth name and that of Ibrahim Ibn Muhammad, a descendant of the Prophet's uncle in whose stead the original Abbasid revolution was fought), al-Baghdadi inscribed himself in a historical continuity whose symbols he scrupulously manipulated. Nour al-Din al-Zenki, whose name a Syrian Islamist brigade had taken, was one of the main heroes of jihadist genealogy, especially revered by al-Zarqawi. As for al-Baghdadi's *kunia* (nom de guerre), Abu Bakr, it derived from the first caliph of Islam Abu Bakr as-Siddiq (573–634 A.D.).

The next day, ISIS published the first issue of *Dabiq*, its English-language online magazine. It was titled after a village on the Syrian-Turkish border from which, according to the Prophet Mohammed, the Christian army would be defeated forever and the Muslims would conquer the world. It looked like a glossy fashion magazine, richly illustrated, alternating between terrifying images of apostates and nonbelievers being executed and romanticized jihadist fighter clichés. It was translated into other languages, for instance, as *Dar al-Islam* ("the abode of Islam") in French. Its mission was to let the thunderclap of the proclaimed new caliphate reverberate everywhere and help make ISIS a prime-time global phenomenon. It also served as a propaganda tool in recruiting young Westerners.

The magazine would be highly effective in this role, judging by the steadily rising number of Europeans leaving for Shām. This exodus was made up of the offspring of Muslim immigrants and converts, a prelude to the attacks that ISIS would coordinate to plunge Europe into mourning the following year and beyond. ISIS overran the village of Dabiq a month later, on August 13, 2014, taking heavy losses. It was not even a strategic target, but simply a reminder of how the organization fixated on making prophecy and reality coincide. Dabiq would remain in ISIS hands for two years, serving as the backdrop for videos threatening the West with endless black flags and decapitations. It was there in November that same year that

the British jihadist Mohammed Emwazi, dubbed "Jihadi John," held up the severed head of the American hostage Peter Abdul Rahman Kassig, an ex-U.S. army ranger, political science student, and humanitarian worker. "Here we are about to bury the first American crusader in Dabiq, and we are waiting impatiently for your other soldiers to have their throats cut and be buried here," Emwazi shouted to the camera. Kassig's conversion to Islam had not earned him a reprieve, although it did earn al-Baghdadi a reprimand from Ayman al-Zawahiri.

ISIS started engineering its serial assassinations in the fall of 2014. Disseminating unbearable images of themselves was part of the campaign to tilt the strategic balance of power in their favor. The mayhem would escalate in 2015 with a series of attacks in Europe. The international coalition formed to destroy ISIS responded with stepped-up bombing. The first major battle in which all the different forces lined up took place in Kobane, a town on the Syrian-Turkish border and also a junction of two Kurdish Rojava provinces. The YPG Kurdish militias had to hold this ground to keep their territory in one piece. ISIS wanted the town so they could control a vital access route to Turkey over which flowed foreign volunteers and supplies.

The Islamic State committed many contingents of fighters to defeating the YPG, which it had never managed before. Some 8,000 jihadists and a force of fifty tanks attacked the town on September 13, 2014. They were superbly equipped, thanks to the weapons stockpiles captured in Mosul. The Islamic State took several of the town's districts, within binocular and camera range of the international media amassed on the other side of the border. The anti-ISIS coalition led by the United States resupplied the Kurdish fighters with airdrops of weapons and munitions. The intense pounding the jihadists took from the air would not break them until January 26, 2015. The border area was finally liberated on June 14, when the town of Tel Abyad, the main ISIS crossing point into Turkey, was taken. It was the first significant military defeat for the Islamic State, costing it almost 1,500 fighters killed.

During the battle for Kobane, a Jordanian pilot Muadh al-Kasasbeh was captured by ISIS when his F-16 taking part in coalition airstrikes was shot down on December 13, 2014. Dressed in the infamous orange overall, he was burned alive in a cage, probably on January 3. The video of his ordeal wasn't posted until a month later. ISIS justified the atrocity as just punishment of apostates. However, the manner of al-Kasasbeh's execution

horrified many potential sympathizers, in view of the Islamic prohibition on burning a condemned Muslim alive. On January 7, the Kuachi brothers in Paris massacred the editorial staff of *Charlie Hebdo* and assassinated an "apostate" policeman of North African heritage. On January 9, Amedy Coulibali killed a French Caribbean policewoman and slaughtered Jewish customers he had taken hostage in a Hypercacher supermarket. From then on, the Shām was projected on the very heart of French territory—although President Hollande had taken the lead in condemning the Syrian regime and in supporting the rebellion.

But ISIS and its followers in Europe invoked the specifically Syrian logic of the attacks as part of a global confrontation between good and evil. During a debate I engaged in with jihadists detained in Villepinte prison in Seine Saint-Denis—north of Paris—in the spring of 2016, one of them challenged me by comparing the number of victims of jihad in France with the Western bombing of "the caliphate's Muslim children." He posed this rhetorical question: "Who kills more? Is it you or us?"

On January 4, 2015, three days before the *Charlie Hebdo* killings and the day after al-Kasasbeh's execution, a Frenchman from Normandy named Maxime Hauchard, infamous for taking part in ISIS slaughtering of Syrian pilots broadcast on social networks, posted this taunt on Twitter: "I stay informed about the economic, political, and social situation in France to better prepare the counterattack . . . The French state should do well to realize that the war will not always be fought in Muslim countries . . . Therefore, one day you better be ready for the Islamic army marching into France. And it will have been well deserved!"

Russia Intervenes, and Aleppo Is Retaken

The year 2015, when the Shām jihad was visited on France and Europe, also marked the direct military intervention by Russia on Syrian territory. This was the first time Moscow projected military force outside the borders of the former USSR since its misguided invasion of Afghanistan in 1979–1989. One justification for the operation was the growing terrorism reflected by the increased jihadist presence in the ranks of the rebellion since ISIS burst onto the scene. The Kremlin also felt itself righteous in intervening because the international coalition led by the United States, which included European

and Arab aircraft, had been entering Syrian airspace to strike ISIS and the Al-Nusra Front.

But, plainly, there was more to it: it was in Russian President Vladimir Putin's interests to render decisive support to save the Syrian regime. And so, on September 30, he sent a Russian expeditionary force numbering several thousand men and a contingent of thirty Sukhoi fighter-bombers to the Hmeimim air base in Syria, close to the Mediterranean coast, south of the city of Latakia. This was the Alawite heartland, and a mere twelve miles from the al-Assad family's stronghold in Qardaha. The Russian air strikes initially supported ground operations by the Syrian army and 50,000 foreign Shiite paramilitaries. They helped loosen the rebel hold on the coastal regions and the major towns Damascus, Homs, Hamas, and Aleppo. They also took back important symbolic targets, such as Palmyra, which ISIS had captured on May 21, 2015.

Since Roman times, Palmyra had been a caravan crossroads between Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean. It was the city of Queen Zenobia, celebrated around the world for its majestic ruins and funerary statues. Seizing it let ISIS link its central territory from Raqqa to Mosul and western Syria toward Homs and Damascus. ISIS also staged events in the ancient city to shock its enemies, in tandem with the multiplying attacks in Europe and Tunisia. It dynamited monuments that were relics of "impious" civilizations, just as it did in Iraq the preceding February, when it destroyed the masterpieces in Mosul's museum and the Assyrian site of Nimrod. Its fighters beheaded Palmyra's former director of antiquities and hung his corpse from a column, followed by the spectacle of having teenagers execute regime soldiers on the proscenium of the Roman theater. Besides its shock value, the mayhem served to demonstrate the Islamic State's global power to galvanize its supporters and boost recruitments.

In Syria proper, Palmyra had other, less cultural connotations: under its Arabic name of Tadmor, it was infamous among a large swath of public opinion for its penitentiary. On June 27, 1980, the Defense Brigades under the President's brother had massacred several hundred Islamists detained there in retaliation for an attempt on the life of Hafez al-Assad the day before. This occurred during a campaign of attacks carried out at the time by the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. A young Abu Musab al-Suri had his baptism by fire here. (The killings of the Libyan jihadists held in the Abu Salim prison in Tripoli took place in a comparable context on June 29, 1996.)

Thus, knocking down Palmyra, which was such a symbol of despotism for many Syrian Sunnis, could only boost the prestige of the Islamic State in the eyes of potential followers.

Aided by intensive Russian bombing, Damascus forces took back Palmyra between March 7 and 26, 2016, assisted by two foreign Shiite militias, Hezbollah and Iran's Revolutionary Guards. On May 5, on Vladimir Putin's suggestion, a triumphal concert of Russian and German classical music was performed in the Roman theater where not long before executions had been carried out. With a UNESCO delegation in the audience, the stunt served to showcase Russia's contribution to civilization's battle against barbarism. However, this would be a fleeting victory, because the main force of the Damascus troops was withdrawn and redeployed to the battle for Aleppo. Hence ISIS moved anew into Palmyra the following December 11. It was only after Aleppo's fall on December 22, 2016 that the Syrian army, backed by the same Russian, Iranian, and Shiite irregulars, went on the offensive again from January 14 to March 2, 2017—and won back the site for good.

The fall of Aleppo, whose eastern half with its downtrodden neighborhoods had been under rebel control since July 19, 2012, was the crowning of Moscow's strategic plan. The victory would now begin to tilt the civil war in favor of its Assad ally in Damascus. The Russians had carried it out methodically ever since August 2013, when the West failed to agree on launching punitive air strikes against Bashar al-Assad for the Ghouta sarin gas attack. For lack of alternatives, the West had been forced to approve the Kremlin's plan for destroying the Syrian chemical weapons under UN authority.

However, the reconquest of Aleppo was eased not just by deploying the usual foreign Shiite forces on the ground and having the Russians attack the insurgent positions from the air. Ankara also played a role, in one of those about-faces that were common during the Levant war, by stopping the flow of supplies to the besieged rebel forces. A meeting on December 20, 2016 between Russian, Turkish, and Iranian officials minus the United States finalized the ceasefire and evacuation of the fighters the Russians, Turks, and rebels had negotiated earlier that month. This realignment by Turkey's President Erdoğan, who was gradually dissociating himself from the American-Sunni axis and drawing closer to Vladimir Putin, is explained by the growing strength of the Kurds. The Turks feared that the Kurds would view the Syrian chaos as an opportunity for translating their gains into Kurdish separatism inside Turkey.

The Great Game, Turkish-Style: Neo-Ottoman Projection and National Constraints

The Turkish-Syrian relationship, lukewarm since the days of Atatürk, had warmed thanks to Professor Ahmet Davutoğlu, an Islamist academic, who became foreign minister (2009–2014) and prime minister (2014–2016) under Tayyip Erdoğan. Davutoğlu developed the vision of a "strategic depth" for Turkey ruled by the Islamic-conservative AKP party. It let Turkey revive a neo-Ottoman appetite for its regional environment after eight decades of secular and Western focus. In 2004, Turkey and Syria signed a free-trade agreement in a first step toward establishing a "Levantine Common Market."

I had the opportunity, as part of a small group of French intellectuals and academics, of meeting Bashar al-Assad in Paris in November 2010, four months before the start of the "Damascus Spring." At the time, the Syrian president was still regarded as reputable. He met with us as part of a charm offensive, and he went on to sing the praises of relations with Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. He envisioned forming a prosperity zone with them on a par potentially with the European Union. But the Ankara-Damascus friendship could not hold up long under the strains of the uprising in Syria. The Turkish government, careful to place itself on the right side of history, encouraged the rebels. In its global policy toward the Arab Spring, Turkey colluded with Qatar in promoting the Muslim Brotherhood, which the AKP could be said to parallel, to positions of power everywhere. This maneuver agreed with the views of the Obama administration and hardly aroused any objections in the European governments—they were resigned to the elevation of a party that mixed an Islamic ethic with the spirit of capitalism.

Turkey also hosted the headquarters for much of the opposition in exile. It was the preferred meeting venue for many conferences and negotiations for the Friends of Syria. And it was the destination for about half of the seven million refugees from the war, as Turkey shared a 511-mile border with Syria. Most of the border crossing points had been in the hands of the rebels from the start of the insurrection. They were the favored corridors for trucking in food, medicine, arms and ammunition, and more. Most of these transfer points were also used by the international coalition supporting the rebels. However, two flows had become problematic starting in 2013.

First, there were the jihadists crossing over to head for the battlefields, or returning from them to commit attacks in Europe. Second, the Al-Nusra Front and ISIS tanker trucks were funneling oil from captured Syrian oil fields through the crossing points. These shipments were estimated in 2015 to be worth 1 to 1.5 million dollars, or about half of the Islamic State's budget, making it the best-financed terrorist organization in the world. This problem, which led to heated arguments in Turkey, was gradually taken care of by systematic Russian air attacks on the tanker convoys. In contrast, the issue of cross-border flows of jihadists repeatedly led to tensions with the Western states, especially in Europe. This happened especially when sizable attacks were committed by fighters returned from Syria who had traveled through Turkey, as in the case of several of the killers of November 13, 2015 in Paris.

Ankara's leniency has been ascribed to its anxieties about developments on the southern side of the border, in Rojava. As noted earlier, this is the autonomous area inhabited by Kurds and administered by the YPD (Syrian Kurdish) party, which has links to the Turkish PKK. The concern was that the Kurds in their quest for autonomy in eastern Anatolia might use the YPD's Turkish connections to the advantage of their cause. Ankara, therefore, would not be unduly upset at the People's Protection Units (YPG—the YPD militias) being harassed by the Al-Nusra Front and especially ISIS, which had condemned the Kurds as *kuffar* (nonbelievers). However, for Turkey's allies in NATO, Ankara turning a blind eye to the enemy of its Kurdish enemy was unacceptable. For the European states suffering terrorism on their own soil, the priority was to wipe out the international jihadists. In fact, the Americans were supplying advanced weaponry to the YPG because it was the most effective—and for a long time the only—fighting force capable of defeating ISIS on the ground. The Turkish authorities and media accused the YPG of diverting some of these arms to the PKK, to use against the national police. In clashes with Kurdish independence fighters that resumed in 2014 after a two-year lull in the town and region of Diyarbakir in the country's southeast, the Turkish police were unexpectedly outgunned.

With tension building between Ankara and its NATO partners, Turkey gradually drew closer to Russia. Their relationship had been under a cloud since November 24, 2015, when the Turks had shot down a Russian Sukhoi Su-24 fighter over the Turkish-Syrian border. This happened two months after the Russians entered Syria and began their bombing sorties against,

among others, the rebels supported by Turkey. Never before had a NATO member shot down a Russian or Soviet military aircraft, even during the Cold War. Moscow retaliated with economic sanctions and started a press campaign accusing one of Erdoğan's sons of having organized oil trafficking with ISIS. It also accused Ankara of being involved in jihadist terrorism. The Russians dusted off the old Communist networks among the Kurdish independentistas (who themselves were crypto-Marxists), delivered some arms, and had their planes bomb convoys carrying oil from ISIS-controlled wells to Turkey.

President Erdoğan expressed his regrets for shooting down the Sukhoi in a letter to his Russian counterpart at the end of June 2016 (mediated by their Kazakh colleague President Nursultan Nazarbayev). The situation turned around spectacularly after the coup attempt against Erdoğan the following July 15. Erdoğan blamed it on Fethullah Gülen, an Islamist preacher living in exile in the United States and erstwhile ally of the AKP in ambition to liquidate the secular heritage of Kemalism in Turkey.

The ferocious repression that followed the failed putsch created serious tensions with the Western chanceries, who criticized it as an attack on democracy. The authoritarian excesses had also included the dismissal of Prime Minister Davutoğlu, regarded by the West as a valued partner. Vladimir Putin, however, immediately reaffirmed his support for his colleague in Ankara, whose governing mode increasingly resembled his own. This sudden coming together manifested itself in a major adjustment of the Turkish position in the Syrian matter. For the West, wiping out ISIS from now on would have priority over getting rid of Bashar al-Assad. The resulting massive support for the Kurdish YPG militia in Syria (born of the Kurdish PKK of Turkey and linked to it) caused deep resentment in Ankara, which viewed it as undermining its vital interests. Erdoğan thus pivoted to fighting the PKK and YPG and away from supporting the Syrian rebels. In doing so, he gave up on eliminating President al-Assad in exchange for an alliance with Moscow and Teheran that he hoped would leave him free to deal with the Kurds as he saw fit.

This complex realignment was tested barely six weeks after the failed coup, in which a number of high-ranking Turkish military officers were implicated and then arrested. Ankara launched the "Euphrates Shield" military operation, which proceeded against heavy opposition from August 26, 2016 to March 29, 2017 on Syrian territory. About 5,000 troops crossed the

border, accompanied by thirty brigades of rebels numbering in the tens of thousands loosely affiliated with the Free Syrian Army. They would depend so heavily on Turkish aid that they were in effect reduced to serving the Turks as auxiliaries.

The offensive targeted ISIS and its control of the border checkpoints at al-Rai and Jarabulus, through which jihadists, contraband, and cash flowed. A second objective was the district of al-Bab and the village of Dabiq. But, beyond ISIS, the Turkish force went after the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a coalition made up mainly of Kurds from the YPG militias plus some Arab groups painted with the same anti-terrorist brush as ISIS by the Turks. The SDF was just as determined to be first in dislodging ISIS from the area it occupied between the majority Kurdish provinces of al-Hasakah in the northeast of Syria and Afrin in the northwest. Winning this sprint would give them an area all in one piece under Kurdish control south of the border. For Ankara, this was unacceptable. The Turkish offensive, backed by the FSA irregulars and with American air support, pushed ISIS out of al-Rai and Jarabulus between August 24 and 26, to the applause of the international community.

Then, from August 27 to 30, the Turkish and rebel troops shelled the SDF and YPG Kurds to force them out of the majority-Arab town of Manbij and withdraw east of the Euphrates. Pressure on Ankara from the Americans and even from the Iranians, who had links to the PKK, stopped the barrages. The offensive then carried on with difficulty until March 23 toward al-Bab, an ISIS strongpoint. But they also fought against the SDF-YPG force there, protected by American Special Forces. The Syrian army and the foreign Shiite contingents played their part by flanking al-Bab on the south until they reached the banks of the Euphrates.

These battles forced ISIS to beat a significant retreat that cost it all access to the border. Four distinct adversaries clashed in the fighting: the Turks and their Syrian rebel auxiliary forces, the Syrian Kurds and their own Arab allies, Bashar al-Assad's "loyalist" troops and Hezbollah fighters, and of course ISIS. The first three pairs skirmished, but within limits, because both the United States and Russia, with their special forces and air support, shielded their protégés against serious harm. Only ISIS was the official mutual enemy, and wiping it out had priority. The "Euphrates Shield" operation already symbolized conflicts that would prolong the Levant war, with interweaved ethnic, sectarian, and ideological issues that brought the

actors into conflict on the ground and led to intervention by the two great powers, America and Russia—until the Kremlin finally took the lead.

Moscow as well as Ankara would pay a heavy price in terrorist reprisals for the offensive. A Turkish policeman, an ISIS sympathizer, killed the Russian ambassador to Turkey on December 20. An attack on New Year's Eve on Istanbul's trendiest nightclub, the Reina discotheque, resulted in thirty-nine deaths. It was the handiwork of an Uzbek jihadist who had passed through the territory belonging to ISIS. And two Turkish soldiers captured during the al-Bab offensive were burned alive in cages like the Jordanian pilot Muadh al-Kasasbeh. The video of their agony was posted online on December 22 2016, the day that Aleppo fell.

Such was the environment in which the negotiated capitulation by the besieged rebels in Aleppo took place. They paid the price of their Turkish godfather's partly abandoning them in return for Moscow granting Erdoğan a free hand with the Kurds. It signaled the end of all hope that the rebellion could ever prevail against the Assad regime, now secure in its future. Yet Ankara also regarded the rebel remnants as a potential asset in future negotiations. Hence, it organized the transport of the defeated fighters to Idlib. During 2017, insurgent brigades that were evacuated after surrendering territory would regroup there. This applied even to the Syrian jihadists driven out of the Lebanese Sunni border town of Ersal by the Lebanese army and Hezbollah in August: they were taken in air-conditioned buses to Idlib through areas controlled by Damascus troops under a safe-conduct pass.

Diverse rebel brigades now face each other in Idlib province, the first where a "liberated territory" had been organized in 2012. Among them were the jihadists of the Al-Nusra Front, caught in a pincer between ISIS, whose detestable terrorist reputation it shared despite the two groups being opponents, and groups well-equipped by the United States or Turkey. Each faction took up positions, in this area as well as in the south around Daraa and on the Golan, to negotiate the best possible future for itself, now that Aleppo had fallen and the destruction of ISIS was a possibility.

The Al-Nusra Front's leader, Abu Mohammad al-Julani, made every effort to dissociate himself from ISIS. A long interview—probably taped in the palace of the just-captured Idlib governor—that he gave Al Jazeera reporter and Muslim Brother Ahmed Mansour on May 27, 2015, got the ball rolling. Here is how the Swedish researcher Aron Lund precisely analyzed it two days later on his authoritative website *Syria in Crisis*: al-Julani

made a statement just by wearing typical Syrian garb and being seated on a Levantine-style chair encrusted with mother-of-pearl. This plus what he said was intended to convey the image of a "moderate jihadist" established in-country, along the line of thinking of Sayyid Qutb, instead of the ultra-Salafism of al-Baghdadi. Thus, al-Julani, encouraged by his obliging interviewer, explained that systematically massacring Christians and Alawites, something ISIS indulged in with its execution videos posted on social media, was beyond the pale. He stated that the former should just pay the head tax (*jiziya*, the humiliating protection tax), while the latter had only to abandon their heresy and return to true Islam.

2016 brought a straw in the wind of radicalization actually diminishing and the rebellion emerging from the dead-end in which it had been trapped by it. It took the form of debates within the Al-Nusra Front. One topic involved changing a name that overly evoked the original relationship with ISIS, and the other dropping its progressively embarrassing allegiance to al-Qaeda. In late July, Al Jazeera exclusively broadcast al-Julani's first appearance with his face uncovered. Apparently, the network had taken on the responsibility of promoting him and his communications. Al-Julani announced that his organization was dissolving, separating from al-Zawahiri, and would be adopting the soberly Islamist name of "Front for the Conquest of Shām" (*Jabhat Fatah ash Shām*—the word *fatah* literally meaning the opening of a territory to Islam).

However, this caused many divisions in Al-Nusra's ranks. Even this diluting of its jihadist identity still did not let the rebranded group blend with other rival brigades gathered in the Idlib region. Six months later, al-Julani would try another name change to "Organization for the Liberation of the Shām" (*Hayat Tahrir ash Shām*) in its ceaseless quest for legitimacy and in an attempt to attract the remaining rebels. Possibly it also testified, after a long, unfruitful war and the loss of Aleppo, to a kind of jihad fatigue as such and to a tactical adjustment. There was nothing very Islamist in the ending word "liberation" (*Tahrir*), this being standard Arab nationalist vocabulary. As for the word "Shām," while it had a messianic connotation in the religious texts, it could also be understood in its neutral, geographic sense as simply standing for "Levant." Splits in local brigades loyal to al-Qaeda led to violence, with imprisonment and executions. It still did not suffice to give the Al-Nusra Front as a whole respectability with the international coalition, despite efforts in this regard by Al Jazeera and by Doha.

The Idlib region was designated as a "deconfliction zone" by the Astana conference, which took place in the Kazakhstan capital in September 2017 to help resolve the military situation in Syria. The perspective was one of a future ceasefire under the auspices of Russia, Iran, and Turkey. In reality, the Russians and Turks did the negotiating on behalf of their respective allies, the Assad regime forces and the rebels. The Russians prevented loyalist Syrian soldiers from attacking the enclave, and the Turks, who, in the spring of 2018, had seven control points inside the zone with several tanks stationed at each, also made sure the insurgents did not fight the Damascus forces. It did not quite turn out that way. Although the Al-Nusra Front was now the Organization for the Liberation of the Shām, its attempts at rebranding had scarcely been convincing. Tainted still by terrorism and jihadism, officially excluded from the truce, the Organization for the Liberation of the Shām prepared an offensive against the town of Hama.

It was, nevertheless, still the dominant force during all of 2017, running the show along the border with Turkey's Hatay province in particular. Through this area came all the humanitarian aid for the two million refugees and displaced people in Idlib province. Its distribution proved to be a unique lever for forcing allegiances and recruitment in the camps. Thus, while the coalition's military offensive under Western leadership in east Syria focused on eradicating the Islamic State at Raqqa, in west Syria there survived a major jihadist center, originally inspired by al-Qaeda's ideology. It was determined to conduct a guerrilla war by expanding its alliances with other rebels, but its power dwindled starting in early 2018. What caused its weakening would be one of the issues in restoring the political landscape after the end of the caliphate.

The Caliphate Falls

Looking back on the year 2017, the main event was the fall of the Islamic State. Its Mosul metropolis in Iraq was captured on July 10, followed by its "capital city" Raqqa on October 17. Erasing ISIS as a geographical entity changed the situation throughout all of Syria, as well as in Western countries that had been hit by international terrorism coordinated from the toppled caliphate. Thus ended a cycle whose ups and downs and complex

outcomes none of the actors truly grasped. But it also marked the start of an era for reorganizing the Middle East and the Mediterranean along lines new and old. The outcome will determine the future of the region, its relations with Europe and the World, and its place in the global system. The fall of both symbolic caliphate cities in Iraq and Syria provided a chance to observe power relationships and anticipate how they would evolve.

The offensive against ISIS in Mosul involved soldiers of the Iraqi state, which recovered its sovereignty on its sunni metropolis on that occasion. In contrast, neither Bashar al-Assad's troops nor the Shiite paramilitaries participated in Raqqa's liberation, being confined to securing the eastern Syrian desert south of the city. Even with an overmatched enemy holding Mosul, it took an alliance of most of the regional and international actors capable of projecting military force a grueling, nine-month campaign to recapture it. Besides Iraq's national army and diverse paramilitaries, it included the Peshmerga sent by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Erbil, local brigades from the Nineveh region (Christians and Yazidis) as well as contingents from Turkey and Iran, plus the eight countries in the United States–led coalition, including France and the United Kingdom. While eradicating ISIS was the mutual objective, each partner watched the others to limit any advantage they might try to draw from the expected shared victory. The same model had prevailed in the "Euphrates Shield" operation a few months earlier. But taking back this Sunni bastion, where ISIS had benefited from collusions and the approval of parts of a local population marginalized by the Maleki government, was only the beginning. Baghdad's forces, trained and equipped by the United States—under the watchful eyes of Iran—had to win hearts and minds too, or they would win the battle but lose the peace.

The complex duopoly exercised over Baghdad by Washington and Teheran required them to get along in Iraq, while everywhere else America and Iran were at loggerheads. It called for holding the Shiite Hachad Chaabi ("Popular Mobilization") paramilitaries, who had already been guilty of numerous excesses against Sunnis during the advance on Mosul, back from the city. The Hachad Chaabi had formed after an appeal by the Grand Ayatollah of Najaf, Ali al-Sistani, following the Iraqi army's collapse of Mosul in June 2014, which let the jihadists take the city without a fight and then advance on Baghdad. Trained and officered by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, that militia since that time represented Teheran's principal stand-ins in Iraq.

In parallel with these forces attacking Mosul from the south, the Peshmergas of the Erbil Kurdistan Regional Government advanced from the northeast. Sunnis for the most part, they benefited from Turkish support, unlike their Turkish PKK rivals. In a post-Ottoman move, Ankara set itself up as a defender of the Sunnis, especially the Turkmen, a Turkish-speaking ethnic minority highly concentrated in the city of Tal Afar on the Syria-Iraq border. This was the nursery for many senior Baathist officers loyal to Saddam Hussein who subsequently were recycled into ISIS as high-ranking commanders. Since President Erdoğan was financing the anti-jihadist militia led by the former governor of Mosul, he wanted to send troops to help retake the city. Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi flatly rebuffed him. One Turkish unit participated anyway, as did the Turkish air force. The Arab-Kurdish hostility sidelined the Peshmergas at Mosul, limiting their ability to provide security for the Christians and Yazidis returning to their villages on the Nineveh plain.

To confront the ten thousand jihadist fighters holding Mosul, the coalition had mobilized a force almost ten times larger, in addition to having an edge in the Western air strikes on the besieged city. Nonetheless, seven months would be required, from November to July, to recapture the metropolis. Just taking back the last five square miles of the Old City took two months of intense fighting. On June 21, 2017, the al-Nuri mosque, with its tilted al-Hadba minaret where Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, dressed in black Abbasid garb, had delivered his first sermon, was dynamited by the jihadists. The ground once occupied by the mosque is marked out today in squares formed by army barricades that display banners representing the Imam Husayn ibn Ali, the founding figure of Shiite martyrology.

After Mosul, the reconquest of Raqqa launched on June 6, 2017, ending after four months and eleven days in October. The town has about one-fifth of the population of the Iraqi metropolis, which still amounted to 1.5 million people on the eve of the offensive. The disparity in forces was much less here, with perhaps three thousand jihadists pitted against only ten thousand attackers. The ground attack was carried out by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), almost entirely composed of Kurds from the YPG aided by some Arab brigades.

The loyalist Syrian army, the Russians, and the Iranians did not take part in the battles, which progressed under the authority of an international coalition led by the United States, supported by France and the

United Kingdom. The Jordanian and Emirati air forces also flew air support missions. When Raqqa fell on October 17, an estimated 1,500 jihadists had been killed, and half that number had been captured. Three hundred men, most of them members of local tribes, were allowed to capitulate and move to the last pocket controlled by ISIS at Deir ez-Zor in exchange for an evacuation of civilians. They would be followed without notice by thousands of jihadists and their families, most of them foreigners, who crammed a small area around the city of Baghouz, on the Euphrates river and close to the Iraqi border—where they would remain until they were defeated and captured by the Kurdish YPG militias in March 2019. On October 18 2017, on Raqqa's main square al-Naim, where ISIS had held public executions, a woman commander of the Women's Protection Units (YPG) planted the flag of the Syrian Democratic Forces. The next day, the Kurds unfurled an immense portrait of Abdullah Öcalan, founder and president of the PKK, currently jailed by Turkey on the island prison of Imrali, whose teachings people read throughout Rojava with the sort of faith usually reserved for catechism.

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On December 11, 2017, Vladimir Putin stopped briefly at the Russian military base at Hmeimim during a trip that took him to Egypt and Turkey. In images broadcast by Sputnik and Russia Today Online, Bashar al-Assad, fussing over the Kremlin's master, looked like his vassal. The Russian president congratulated himself on the success of his troops in the fight against terrorism. He also announced that a significant part of the expeditionary corps would be returning home, their mission accomplished. And yet, the Russian troops remained in place. They played a key role in coordinating and supporting the regime's offensive launched February–April 2018 against eastern Ghouta, a densely populated suburb of Damascus. With the forty-fifth president of the United States appearing to have little appetite for acting in the Middle East, and with the regional actors deeply divided, a new page for ending the Syrian conflict was turned uncertainly after six years of the process called "destruction of a nation." The expression was coined by Nikolaos van Dam, a longtime observer of the country and author of one of the best books about the Syrian civil war, *Destroying a Nation* (Hurst, 2017).

Conclusion

Although the Islamic State is now history, the "destruction of the nation" of Syria, taken to the extreme by ISIS outlining a jihadist state that erased the "impious" border drawn between Iraq and Syria in 1916 by the Sykes-Picot Agreement, nevertheless remains an elastic situation. Syria, which the French League of Nations mandate had originally divided between WWI and WWII into the states of Damascus, Aleppo, the Druze, and a territory of the Alawites, as well as the Sanjak of Alexandretta, was once again divided into zones as 2017 ended. Some were controlled by the Assad regime, others by rebels, others yet again by the Kurds of the PYD. The Turkish army had a presence, and in February–March 2018 it made an incursion into the border canton of Afrin where it was fighting the Kurds—with Shiites irregulars trained by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard coming to the rescue of the Kurds . . .

At the same time, Teheran was allied with Ankara under the Astana peace process. The Russian ground troops and air wing engaged in combat, mostly from their base at Hmeimim, and the American Special Forces remained in the east supporting the Kurds. In February 2018, the U.S. soldiers and air force fought off a raiding party of Arab tribesmen and Russian mercenaries at an oil well. It cost the attackers dozens of dead. Like the roving groups of brigands of the European Middle Ages, Shiite paramilitaries lived off the land and set up strongpoints in which Damascus barely had any say. The same held true for various Sunni brigades, ranging from the remains of the Free Syrian Army (now vassals of Ankara) to jihadists of all stripes that exploited the local population, with or without sharia's stamp of approval. This situation was replicated to a lesser degree in Yemen and—to some extent—also in Libya. But it was in Syria that it peaked: the interactions between parastatal actors and foreign powers created elements of the chaos that symbolizes par excellence the most extreme challenge confronting all of the Mediterranean Middle East. The following pages will attempt to define the issues and contextualize them, in light of the global changes the Middle East would endure as Moscow tightened its grip and Washington under Donald Trump gradually pulled out of the region.

PART III

After ISIS: Disintegration and Regrouping

EIGHT

The Fracturing of the Sunni Bloc

IN OCTOBER 2017, when the ISIS caliphate disappeared, the Sunni world was deeply divided. It had nevertheless faced off as a bloc against Shiism during the Arab Spring of the year 2011, as the repression of the Bahrain uprising, beginning on March 14, demonstrated. Carried out by armed forces and police from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar on behalf of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), it was a preemptive move against an expansionist Teheran.

Later that year, however, all the important Sunni states bordering on Syria threw their weight behind the massively Sunni rebellion against the regime of Bashar al-Assad, an Alawite propped up by Iran and Russia. An axis lining up Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, Doha, Cairo, Amman, and Ankara had joined with the Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to found the Friends of Syria. This international consensus for supporting the opposition included Washington and Brussels (as capital of the European Union).

The group first met in Tunis in February 2012, and in December the representatives of 114 nations gathered again in Marrakesh. But by the time of the sixth and final meeting in Doha on June 22, 2013, their number had dwindled to eleven. Meanwhile, an Islamist movement had gradually taken over the rebellion in Syria. Some brigades had even turned jihadist. The competition sharpened between armed rebel groups supported by Qatar and Turkey and others backed by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

And in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood's drive for leadership of the uprisings ran into opposition ranging from secularist democrats to the military. Both sides also had their respective godfathers and sponsors, with Doha and Ankara contending against Riyadh and Abu Dhabi.

Ostracizing Qatar

With the writing on the wall for Egyptian President Morsi, on June 28, 2013 the Emir of Qatar, Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, announced his abdication. This happened in the week following the last conference on Syria. Thirty-three-year-old Crown Prince Tamim, the emir's favorite son from his media-savvy third wife Sheikha Muza, took his place. In giving up power at the age of sixty-one, the father took responsibility for the ambitious but failed policy that had aimed to make the Muslim Brotherhood the beneficiaries of the Arab Spring. He had expected in return the Brotherhood would help him oppose Saudi Arabia for hegemony over the Sunni world.

By maneuvering the succession in this way, sheikh Hamad Al Thani pushed aside Prime Minister Hamad bin Jassim, the country's richest man and architect of the Al Jazeera network, the prime media mouthpiece for the Muslim Brotherhood. This let the ex-emir pin some of the blame for the strategic failure of backing them on bin Jassim and, to some extent, take the dynasty off the hook. In any event, two days later in Cairo, a giant demonstration escorted by army helicopters flying overhead marched against President Morsi. On July 3, a proclamation came that complete power was vested in General el-Sisi, who enjoyed the support of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Despite the change in Qatar's leadership, the Sunni bloc's fracturing deepened during the next four years, aggravated by the conflict between the Muslim Brotherhood and their opponents. In Libya, Doha (shoulder to shoulder with Ankara) supported the Fajr Libya Islamists in Tripoli, the similarly inclined radical Mufti Sadiq al-Ghariani who owned an influential television network modeled on Al Jazeera, and the ex-jihadist Abdelhakim Belhaj. Forming the opposing camp, Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, and Cairo took sides with Marshal Haftar in Cyrenaica and Zintan's militias in Tripolitania. The latter had Saif al-Islam Gaddafi in their custody, who announced in December 2017 that he intended to run for president of the Republic.

Meanwhile, in Tunisia, Doha and Ankara supported Ennahda while Nidaa Tounes had Abu Dhabi and Egypt in its corner. In Yemen, from March 2015 Qatar was part of the international coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates against the Houthis that had taken over Sanaʿa. However, Qatar also pursued its own agenda by keeping open a communications channel with the Houthis in hopes of negotiating a solution to the crisis. Simultaneously, Qatar maintained a privileged relationship with the al-Islah party, the local branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. The group's religious charities and humanitarian organizations moved into the country to set up assets that would give Qatar opportunities to wield its soft power.

The arrival of Donald Trump in the White House in January 2017 shut down the engagement with the Muslim Brotherhood begun by his predecessor Barack Obama. It also changed the course of Washington's Iran policy, calling into question the Vienna Agreement of July 14, 2015 (also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA) for limiting Teheran's nuclear program in return for lifting the economic sanctions. On his first foreign trip, the forty-fifth president of the United States on May 21–22, 2017 made Riyadh his first stop. There he elevated the fight against terrorism to the top of the agenda, targeting Iran and its allies Hezbollah and Hamas as well as the Sunni ensemble of ISIS and al-Qaeda.

This verbal replica of George W. Bush's "War on Terror" would be bolstered by a reshuffling in the American administration when two veterans of that war, Mike Pompeo and John Bolton, became secretary of state and national security adviser, respectively. But this time the call to arms had a different motive. In 2001, Saudi Arabia had been the object of grave suspicions and deep mistrust because fifteen of the nineteen kamikaze attackers on 9/11 had been Saudis. The neoconservative pipe dream had been to raise up a democratic Shiite Iraqi republic as the principal surrogate of the United States in the region, thus punishing the House of Saud by substituting Baghdad as a hydrocarbon swing producer. This time, Saudi Arabia was promoted to prime vector of the new American anti-terrorist axis.

From now on, the failure of this project, followed by the Iran-Russia success in the Syrian civil war, gave the Saudi monarchy, headed de facto by Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, pride of place in the American strategy. This full absolution of any Saudi involvement in (or at least acquiescence to) the "blessed double raid" on New York and Washington was

affirmed dramatically in Riyadh's royal palace when President Trump, King Salman, and Marshal el-Sisi inaugurated the Global Center for Fighting Extremist Ideology, known in Arabic as *Iʿtidal* or "moderation." The three had themselves photographed joining hands over a mysterious glowing orb, surrounded by Sunni leaders. It looked for all the world like the United States was subcontracting the mission to the monarchy in this region and ratifying the latter's designated enmities.

On May 24, two days after the anti-terrorist summit in Riyadh, which Emir Tamim had attended as a minor participant, the strain between Qatar on the one hand and Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE, and Egypt on the other intensified. The official *Qatar News Agency* quoted the Emir as calling Iran a "stabilizing power in the region" that "could not be ignored," and that would be "imprudent to confront." His opponents had a propaganda field day with these words, over Doha's protestations that the news agency's website had been hacked (they blamed first Moscow and then Abu Dhabi) and that this was "fake news."

The argument driving this sudden escalation in tensions had its origin in a ransom paid by Qatar in mid-April for the release of twenty-six hostages, including royalty. The hostages had been captured in southern Iraq by a local branch of Hezbollah during a great bustard hunt, an activity much prized by members of the Bedouin aristocracy partial to falconry. The *New York Times* reported that Qatar paid fifty million U.S. dollars to the Organization for the Liberation of Shām (formerly the Al-Nusra Front) and its Salafist allies in Ahrar al-Shām. This came on top of the astronomical sums handed over to the Shiite abductors and various intermediaries.

The injection of roughly a billion U.S. dollars into the war in Levant, benefiting the extremists in both camps, played into the Saudi and Emirati accusations of Doha as "financing terrorism." The kidnappers were said to have extorted this prodigious sum to bribe the Al-Nusra Front commanding the jihadist groups that were besieging two Shiite villages, al-Fu'ah and Kefriya, in Idlib province to secure the evacuation of their residents. That, in return, would have allowed the transfer to this "deconfliction zone" of the population of two rebel Sunni villages near Damascus encircled by militias linked to the Assad regime. These villages, Mayada and al-Zabadani, situated in the Anti-Lebanon Mountains, were bargaining chips for lifting the siege of the two Shiite villages.

The enormity of the sums involved—and the quality of the hostages—suggested contacts within the highest echelons of Iran, Hezbollah's mentor. The Qataris argued that they paid the ransom to the Iraqi government, which, in fact, kept about one-third of the money. (Robert Worth reconstructed the peculiar circumstances under which this happened in his detailed investigation published in the March 14, 2018 issue of the *New York Times* magazine.) But the bulk of the funds promoted a kind of ethnic-sectarian cleansing in Syria that benefited the Assad regime and its allies. It included securing the Damascus vicinity by clearing it of the insurgent Sunni populations. Doha, by saving its elite hostages, had handed its adversaries the ideal opportunity as well as resources for going on the attack.

This tactical error also let the "Saudi bloc," formed by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt, paint Qatar simultaneously as paymaster of Sunni terrorism and Teheran's accomplice. All this transpired as the international coalition's offensive against the ISIS caliphate in Mosul was in full swing. On June 5–6, these four bloc states cut diplomatic ties with Qatar and threw a suffocating ground, sea, and air blockade around it. In effect, this maneuver diluted the unity of the GCC because Kuwait maintained contacts with Qatar, offering to serve as mediator in the crisis. But as a council member, it had also joined Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in praising the proclamation by Marshal el-Sisi in July 2013. The sultan of Oman (whose adherence to Ibadism had always distanced him from Sunni solidarities) similarly lifted the embargo against Qatar at its ports and airports.

Both states worried that if Doha could be brought to heel, they might be next in line for similar treatment. They might wind up mere vassals of the Saudi giant, just as Bahrain had when the Saudis had stifled its Shia revolt in Manama on March 14, 2011. The GCC may have been created in 1981 for preventing the spread of Iran's Islamic revolution to the Arabian Peninsula, but de facto it was a body in which the small, coastal Gulf states were dominated by their overbearing Saudi neighbor. It diminished their sovereignty after their independence had been championed, first by the British, then by the West in general. Their motive: keep Riyadh from controlling too big a share of the global hydrocarbon market.

Emir Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani of Qatar had reacted to this state of affairs in 1995 by overthrowing his father for being subservient to Saudi Arabia. He then made distancing himself from the kingdom his policy.

He succeeded thanks to the exponential growth of state revenues during his reign from extraction and exports of liquefied natural gas (LNG). Qatar's GNP multiplied from eighteen to 210 billion U.S. dollars (for 2.6 million inhabitants, of which three hundred thousand were citizens) during Al Thani's two decades on the throne until his abdication in favor of his son Tamim in June 2013.

While Saudi Arabia's gerontocracy stagnated, Qatar put its windfall riches to work in an across-the-board modernization. It advocated for the sociological transformation of the Middle East, moved into the channels of Arab soft power then still in their infancy, and furnished a dynamic model as an alternative to calcified Saudi Arabia. In 1996, the year after he took the throne, Emir Al Thani created the Al Jazeera network. It became the ultimate media vector for this "irritant" monarchy, as Claire Talon detailed in her book *Al Jazeera* (2011). The network grew into the permanent sounding board for broadsides and attacks against Saudi Arabia by every opponent, earning Qatar the recall of the Saudi ambassador between 2002 and 2008. Qatar once again became the focal point of the 2017 crisis because of the crucial role it had played in the Arab uprisings since 2011, as well as its widespread promotion of the Muslim Brotherhood.

It was no coincidence that shutting down Al Jazeera was at the top of Riyadh's list of thirteen demands for lifting the blockade. It also called for reducing the level of diplomatic ties with Iran, as well as breaking with the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, ISIS, al-Qaeda, the Al-Nusra Front (later renamed the Organization for Liberating the Shām) and Hezbollah. Further, Riyadh wanted a Turkish military base in Qatar where some dozens of soldiers were moving in closed. Ankara's parliament had ratified building the base in June 2015, an element in the two states aligning their policies in support of the Syrian rebels and of the Muslim Brothers globally. Since the blockade's onset, Turkey's Erdoğan had sided with Qatar. He actually increased the number of his troops at the controversial base (it would reach three thousand by March 2018). He exported massive amounts of foodstuffs to replace (in addition to those coming from Iran) the imports that Qatar had previously obtained either directly from or shipped through Saudi Arabia. Finally, in an ultimate jab at its opponents, on August 24, Doha announced that it would accredit an ambassador to Teheran.

With the breakup of the Sunni bloc starting in the spring of 2017, bringing to a head the splintering that the Arab uprisings in 2011 had catalyzed

but which had older roots, Qatar and Turkey moved closer to Iran. This came as a surprise, because the two allies supported the Muslim Brotherhood against the Assad regime, which Iran was backing. This improbable Sunni-Shiite trio was born in reaction to Saudi Arabia and its partners, thereby sabotaging the seemingly cohesive Sunni bloc facing off against its Shiite opponents. However, beyond the twists and turns of the Levantine war, an ideological convergence had existed from early on between Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood. Both had at their core a pious middle class, and both were determined to set up a politico-religious regime. Both Teheran and its Lebanese proxy Hezbollah welcomed the creation of Hamas in December 1987 despite it being a Sunni organization.

In 1984, Iran issued a postage stamp "in memory of Sayyid Qutb's martyrdom," which depicted the radical Egyptian Muslim Brother, author of *Signposts*, behind bars against a red background, before he was hanged by the Nasser regime. This was the color often used during this era for glorifying the many *shahid*s ("martyrs") in the war against Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei himself translated several of Qutb's works from Arabic into Persian. And Fathi Shaqaqi, founder of the (Sunni) Palestinian Islamic Jihad dedicated his manifesto to the "two imams of the twentieth century," namely Khomeini and Banna. While Salafism condemns Shiism as heresy, with Shiism returning the favor by putting the Salafists down as *takfiri* (a Muslim who accuses another Muslim of impiety), the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Republic of Iran did not quarrel before the Syrian civil war. In fact, while he was making the rounds in Paris on June 29, 2017 during the Saudi-Qatar crisis, Iran's minister of foreign affairs Mohammad Javad Zarif described the Brotherhood to me in highly complimentary terms. He characterized it as a very important political current, perfectly qualified to exercise power. This was like a slap in the face of his Saudi adversaries, no doubt only sharpening the contradiction in the Sunni world.

The accusations against Qatar echoed in tweets sent by President Donald Trump upon his return from the Middle East on June 9, 2017. The most telling of these stated: "@realDonaldTrump: So good to see the Saudi Arabia visit with the King and 50 countries already paying off. They said they would take a hard line on funding . . . extremism and all reference was pointing to Qatar. Perhaps this will be the beginning of the end to the horror of terrorism." An official White House statement later that day was even more to the point: "The nation of Qatar unfortunately has been financing terrorism, and at a very high level."

High officials in the American administration tried to walk this back. The Pentagon was quick to reiterate its "gratitude to the Qataris for their long-term support of [our] presence and their enduring engagement in the region's security." Little wonder, since Qatar let CentCom (the American command for the zone) operate the Al Udeid Air Base to the southwest of Doha. At the time, it had a complement of eleven thousand American troops and a hundred airplanes that flew strikes against ISIS positions in Mosul. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson (he would be replaced by Mike Pompeo in the spring of 2018), who knew and appreciated the leadership in Doha from his days as CEO of Exxon Mobil, called on the parties to settle their differences peacefully.

This massive pressure on Qatar was a central element in Saudi Arabia's strategic reorientation engineered by Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman. With ambitious reforms, he sought to bring the kingdom out of its slowly dying rentier economy, thus ensuring its long-term revival. The price of oil had dropped 70 percent between 2014 and 2016, the period that had seen eighty-year-old Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud succeed his half-brother Abdullah to the throne. The decline translated into a one hundred billion U.S. dollar budget gap that took about 15 percent of the kingdom's monetary reserves to plug. At that pace, observers predicted the treasury would run out of money by 2020.

This stark forecast would be revised, thanks to the rebound in the price of crude to a range between fifty and seventy U.S. dollars per barrel in 2017. This turnaround was just one of the effects of an agreement among two of the world's major oil producers, sealed on October 5, 2017 with the first visit to Moscow by a Saudi monarch since Saudi Arabia's founding in 1932. It underscored the high stakes of such an accord, never mind that the two governments each had been strongly committed to opposing sides in Syria. However, in the medium term, the increased exploitation of shale gas and oil deposits at a very competitive cost, especially in the United States, posed them both a major threat. Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman understood that failing to diversify Saudi Arabia's economy and, by extension, profoundly transform society, would mean the end of the Saudi model.

Saudi Arabia had evolved into a tribal and rentier regime that determined both the allocation of resources and succession to power. This dates from the time that the sovereign Abdulaziz Ibn Saud made the "Quincy Pact" with U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt on February 14, 1945. In practice, the

hydrocarbon income is distributed based according to a secret algorithm, but payments to the dynasty's various branches are generally thought to equal 20 percent of the total (equal to two million of every ten million barrels per day).

The sums vary in proportion to how close a branch is to the one headed by the reigning monarch. Of top precedence are the dynasty branches belonging to the monarch's brothers, then those belonging to his half-brothers by his father's other wives, their male children and their descendants, and so on down the line. At the top of this family tree perch "Their Royal Highnesses," princes descended in the male line from Ibn Saud. They alone are allowed to compete for succession to the throne. In 2007, under King Abdullah, they formed an Allegiance Council charged with determining the succession by consensus. However, this body was rendered deadlocked by the powerful competing clans.

The patriarch of the House of Saud and most of his forty-five sons had multiple wives, thus fathering an abundance of descendants. Added to this are the marriage alliances made to increase the family's numbers, helping it maintain its sway over the commoners and safeguard the family's outsized share of the oil revenues. However, the resulting exponential growth in the number of beneficiaries reduces per capita payments, unless the price of crude rises at the same pace. In Bedouin tradition, men died young due to the hardships of life in the desert marked by nonstop fighting. Back then, begetting many sons was a necessity for the tribe's survival. The succession to head it passed by lateral transmission, because the children were often minors when the father died.

The Saudi dynasty today continues to follow a broadly based polygamy model. It gave precedence to solidarity among brothers coming from diverse mothers over the power of a single individual to see his own offspring follow him on the throne. To do otherwise would have weakened family cohesion, putting at risk its global hegemony over the whole of society. The brothers of King Saud (who ruled from 1953 to 1964), the first to have inherited the throne from the patriarch Abdulaziz, forced him to abdicate when he tried to pass the monarchy on to his descendants.

When Salman was crowned in January 2015, this system had become so decrepit that fixing it was urgent. In purely biological terms, the problem stemmed from the royal family's sedentary lifestyle in the luxurious palaces and access to the most costly geriatric health practices paid for by their

fabulous black gold riches. They had prolonged life expectancy considerably, and as such had remained in power into their eighties. The Bedouins in the old days, by contrast, had died in the prime of life. This rigid succession mechanism stymied innovation and competition, which had caused the regime to seize up. It just managed to coast along on a tide of oil income without having to confront reality.

As we saw, this stagnancy provided openings for Qatar to challenge Saudi leadership with multiple initiatives and provocations. Dubai had similarly taken advantage of Saudi Arabia's torpor by innovating goods and services that the neighboring giant hydrocarbon producers could not provide. This meant that Riyadh, but also Teheran and Baghdad for different reasons, were hobbled by the same lack of public and private freedoms. In Saudi Arabia, this gave rise to a culture of corruption benefiting many leading members of the ruling family. It was socially feasible as long as the abundant income held up, but when it started to dry up, the entire system went into crisis mode. Income was decimated by the drop in the price of crude combined with the enormous, irresponsible population growth made possible by the petroleum cash cow. In 2004, in my book *The War for Muslim Minds*, I summarized the dilemma faced by the Saudi power:

> Caught between a need for absolute unity and the urgency to modernize its system of succession. At risk was the dynasty's dominion over its country and its control of oil wealth. This dilemma of succession did not make the family stronger when renegotiating the terms of its alliance with Wahhabites, an alliance on which it based its title to govern legitimately . . . (p. 187)

The Ritz Carlton Revolution

It was left to Mohammad bin Salman to unravel the Gordian knot of the tribal-rentier system. He cut through it in one blow. On November 4, 2017, empowered as president of an anti-corruption commission formed that same day, he ordered some two hundred dignitaries rounded up and confined in the Riyadh Ritz Carlton. They included eleven Highnesses, both current and former ministers, and businessmen. This act of force, which effectively had the thirty-one-year-old crown prince acting as the absolute sovereign, but under his father's benevolent tutelage, had several causes

and some major consequences. Two stages preceded it: the end of lateral succession among the sons of Ibn Saud, followed by the institution of a de facto hereditary monarchy.

In fact, as Ibn Saud's youngest surviving son, seventy-year-old Mukrin was King Salman's heir apparent for a mere three months before he was shunted aside in April 2015. Minister of the Interior Mohammad bin Nayef replaced him, promoted from his status as second crown prince, which Mohammad bin Salman assumed in his stead. The latter had held the defense portfolio since January, and had been placed in charge of the March offensive against the Houthis in Yemen. For the first time, it was exclusively the generation of the Ibn Saud's—the founding monarch—grandchildren that was in line for the throne. It was an infinitely larger cohort than that of his children, and, because it included cousins between whom the ties were weak, it was less cohesive than that of brothers. At this kinship level, the tribal system could no longer accommodate the consensual, laterally transmitted dynasty, whose spectrum would be far too large. It called for a new mode of absolute monarchical power.

Against this background, the tensions between the first and second crown princes became common knowledge. On June 21, 2017, Mohammad bin Nayef was relieved of his duties and placed under house arrest. His cousin Mohammad bin Salman, the king's son, strengthened by the ostentatious reconciliation with the United States during President Trump's visit the preceding month, replaced him. Thus, King Salman in two years had utterly transformed the dynastic institution and established a hereditary succession by paternity. It stopped the decay of the Saudi regime and eased a shake-up of the decision-making structure in an authoritarian direction, while speeding it up for greater efficiency. It was intended to prepare society to gradually free itself, on the economic level, from the exclusive and moribund dependence on oil income, and, on the political level, from legitimization by the Wahhabite religious establishment. Still, this transition aroused plenty of frustrations within the royal family, all the more so since the cashiered Mohammad bin Nayef, age fifty-eight, had a powerful support network.

Mohammad bin Salman now proceeded to consolidate his power in two stages. Both occurred consecutively in the same emblematic place: the Ritz Carlton Hotel, a grandiose, neoclassical palace on the edge of Riyadh's diplomatic quarter. On October 24, addressing more than 3,800 international

economic leaders assembled before him, the crown prince, in his capacity as president of the Public Investment Fund (PIF), rolled out a *Future Investment Initiative* designed to attract foreign investments. He capped his address by announcing that Saudi Aramco, the world's number one oil company, would soon list part of its share capital on the stock exchange. He went on to paint in glowing colors a future-oriented kingdom in tune with new technologies wrapped in a drone-equipped city of the future called Neom. It would be located in the northwest corner of the country, on the eastern shore of the Gulf of Aqaba across from Egypt's Sinai, adjoining Jordan and near Israel. To win Western hearts and minds in his audience, on the stage he conferred Saudi nationality on a (female) robot named Sophia, which (or perhaps who) then addressed the meeting.

And in an interview with President Trump's favorite television network, Fox News, the crown prince frankly admitted for the first time that the kingdom had to "return to what we were before 1979." This pivotal year pegs the first time that "extremist ideas" began to spread. He went on to say that in a country "where 79 percent of the population is under thirty years old, we are not going to lose another thirty years because of them," but "will stamp them out very quickly" for the sake of "leading a normal life where everyone gets along with each other."

In a subsequent interview with the *The Atlantic* magazine of April 2, 2018, Mohammad bin Salman would elaborate that it was this fateful year (eight years before he was born) "which exploded everything. The Iranian revolution created a regime based on an ideology of pure evil . . . and in the Sunni world extremists were trying to copy it. We had the attack on [the Mosque of] Mecca." In the same breath, he denied that Wahhabism was a doctrine and praised Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab as one of the peninsula's great minds. He pointed out that the West, when it was fighting communism, had encouraged the Muslim Brotherhood. He also noted that an American president (Ronald Reagan) in the 1980s had called the jihadists in Afghanistan "freedom fighters." Still, he conceded that "people in Saudi Arabia had financed terrorist groups" but this would no longer be tolerated. "We have a lot of people in jail now, not only for financing terrorists, but even for supporting them."

Beyond this princely tip of the hat to the religious establishment, bin Salman would nonetheless clip its wings with the royal decree of September 2017, which on June 24, 2018—following the month of Ramadan—would

allow women to drive. Reading between the lines, these comments marked an initiative to end the transactional relationship between the dynasty and the ulemas. Until then, the dynasty had shored up its legitimacy with the ulemas' blessings in return for establishing the highly visible, dreaded religious police ("Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice"). In the same breath, he also signaled a break with a radical sphere of influence inspired by Salafist clerics who, as I was told in Riyadh by the secretary general of the Muslim World League, "are forbidden from rebelling against the Muslim prince (*la yajouz al khorouj ʿala wali al amr*)."

In the first stage of the "Ritz Carlton" revolution in late October 2017, the crown prince sought to establish a new political legitimacy for the ruling power by mobilizing young people with promises of the jobs that foreign investment would bring. It could not have been a clearer shake-up of the rentier state. In reemphasizing the break with "extremism" proclaimed by King Salman and President Trump in May 2017, the crown prince simultaneously relativized the monarchy's religious veneer, making it simply a formality. The second stage consolidated the first by affirming his authority to seize the assets of his competitors within the Saud family. He offered up its members as "corrupt" in a move to appeal to the up-and-coming generation that he aimed to make his main base of support.

The *Future Investment Initiative* exhibits had barely been removed when the Ritz Carlton's regular guests were relodged in other Riyadh hotels so it could be turned into an exclusive detention and interrogation center. Nearly two hundred individuals, including eleven princes of royal blood rounded up throughout the country, would be sequestered there. The most prominent detainee was the legendary Al-Waleed bin Talal, Ibn Saud's grandson, Saudi Arabia's wealthiest man according to *Forbes* magazine's listing in March 2017, which also listed him as the fiftieth-richest individual in the world. Bin Talal's estimated assets totaled 18.7 billion U.S. dollars, and his holdings included shares in the who's who of world businesses. Yet he was considered a "liberal" like the crown prince when it came to morality: he was for women's emancipation.

But at stake in this second stage of the Ritz Carlton Revolution was purging the economy and reinforcing the leadership, not changing customs. Another powerful captive was the son of the deceased sovereign, Mutaib bin Abdullah, former head of the National Guard. The National Guard's members were the monarchy's Praetorians, and it was one of the key elements in the

national security apparatus. Prince Mutaib also oversaw the priority target of the investigation, the foundation that managed the fortune of Abdullah's children. The members of the previous king's entourage, many of whom had intrigued against his successor now occupying the throne, were prime targets of the dragnet. Prince Mutaib, incidentally the owner of the luxury Hotel Crillon in Paris, would be the first prominent figure released from the Ritz Carlton on November 21. Bloomberg reported that he wrote a check for one billion U.S. dollars in exchange for his freedom (a total of one hundred billion U.S. dollars would be turned over to the government coffers). One detainee died; the palace denied rumors of torture. Without any judicial proceedings to speak of, the charges against the arrestees included wrongful amassing of wealth facilitated by diversion of oil income.

As I write these words, much remains obscure about what transpired at the Ritz Carlton in November 2017 and the sums paid by those held in return for their release. But one thing is clear: the "anti-corruption" operation showed beyond any doubt that going forward Saudi Arabia would have one absolute authority, with no room for baronies. While visiting the kingdom in February–March, I did not observe any expression of sympathy or compassion for the accused royals and businessmen—in the eyes of the young people, they were symbols of an old regime that had diverted wealth from them. Still, the task now will be fulfilling the promises to match aspirations, a gigantic challenge in a society that remains profoundly conservative.

Tom Friedman, the *New York Times* columnist, after interviewing Prince Mohammad bin Salman in November 2017, crowned him the surprise inheritor of the Arab revolutions. Only in Saudi Arabia's case, he wrote, was it a top-down revolution and therefore more likely to succeed than the bottom-up uprisings of 2011. It remains to be seen if the crown prince can expand his base of support beyond the educated youth and the globalized middle classes to mobilize the broader, deeper forces whose absence was one of the principal reasons for the failure of the Arab Spring.

Sunni Debacle and Co-Management of Shiism in Iraq

The fall of Mosul on July 9, 2017 destroyed the ISIS state infrastructure in Iraq, but it also left Sunnism in Mesopotamia at a loss. The jihadists had wreaked huge damage, blowing up numerous buildings including the

famous al-Nuri mosque where they had proclaimed their caliphate. Such depredations combined with massive bombardments by the international coalition had transformed the western bank of the Tigris river into a vast heap of ruins. All that remained of the mosque's famous leaning minaret, nicknamed al-Hadba ("hunchback"), was a pathetic stub rising from a pile of rubble. Standing out from the Arabic graffiti that covered it was one that said it all in English: "Fuck ISIS."

Another ruin was recognizable from many propaganda videos as the building from whose roof men condemned for being sodomites by ISIS sharia courts had been thrown. Elsewhere, at the entrance to the Maidan old town, stretched the public square where the French-Algerian Rachid Kassim, also known as l'Oranais de Roanne, and an accomplice had cut the throats of two orange-clad Shiites. As they did it, the horrific Oranais, former social worker and rapper, spouted hip-hop threats at François Hollande about bringing similar terrors to French streets. A few weeks later, he would direct death threats at me.

The major roads had been cleared, but no one ventured among the ruins jammed with automobile carcasses and their buried corpses, where posted notices warned against mines and booby-traps. All that was left standing of the Convent of the Clock of the Dominican Fathers was its steeple. From here, Father Najeeb Michael had loaded hundreds of historic manuscripts into his car to rescue them from jihadists who would have burned them. He told the story in *Saving Books and Men* (Grasset, 2017). During my visit on April 21–22, 2018, this landscape of desolation reminded me of the appalling images of Berlin in ruins that Roberto Rossellini's 1948 film *Germany Year Zero* opens with.

Beyond the erasure of ISIS, the ruination of Mosul in effect collectively punished a Sunni community rightly or wrongly suspected of having collaborated with ISIS. At the very least, the Sunnis were alleged to have facilitated the jihadists taking over the city and the surrounding Nineveh plain during their lightning offensive in the summer of 2014. The motive: resentment against the discriminatory policies pursued by the Shiite Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. Numerous witness statements, including ones by the traumatized members of Christian minorities that had fled for their lives, testified to the abuses visited on them by members of the Sunni majority.

Mosul was an especially conservative city, where I never saw a single woman without the veil, not even on the university campus on the

relatively undamaged east bank of the river. This was nine months after the caliphate's fall! No foreigner or any non-Sunni—save the Iraqi soldiers and Shiite militiamen from the "Popular Mobilization" units that controlled the checkpoints—at that time would risk spending the night for fear of hostile action by jihadis. Their infrastructure had been wrecked, but a good number of the fighters had melted into the population. They did so especially among the hundreds of thousands of residents displaced because their homes had been destroyed, who were now living in horrid conditions in refugee camps outside the city.

During my visit, I was asked to give a lecture in Arabic at the already-rebuilt law faculty. (It had been destroyed by ISIS in reprisal for impious law having been taught there, contravening the divine sharia that alone had legitimacy under the caliphate.) In the session following the lecture, several local participants questioned the resilience of the jihadist ideas beyond the military defeat. But the majority, out of the blue and not mincing words—with conspiracy theories at the ready—blamed the West for having created the terrorist organization, thus holding them responsible for the calamity that had consumed the city. These comments blended with a strong hostility toward the (Shiite) central power in Baghdad, which the speakers accused of abandoning Mosul to its fate.

Iraqi Sunnism, which ISIS had appropriated, was undeniably under a dark cloud now that the jihadists had been defeated. Even its supporters on the Saudi Arabian peninsula seemed to be stepping back, at least for the moment. They had financed recurring Sunni insurrections since 2003 against the Iraqi state apparatus stigmatized for being controlled by Shiites and influenced from within by Iran. The defeat of ISIS was followed by the political bankruptcy of the sect that the terrorist organization had wrongfully commandeered. It contributed to weakening Sunnism throughout the region. Added to this was the rout of the Syrian rebels after the loyalist army and its Russian ally had retaken the Damascus suburbs of Ghouta in early April 2018 (more on this below).

Washington and Riyadh both in effect fell back on Iraq as the principal frontline for containing Iranian expansion. But this line no longer passed through support for a discredited Sunni community whose name had been ruined thanks to the receptivity of some of its members to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's caliphate. It was within the Shiite denomination, henceforth in charge institutionally, that the confrontation would now play out between

the United States, its Saudi bloc allies, and Israel on one side, against Iran and its Russian partner on the other. This was a complex antagonism, seeing that it involved, in addition to diverse Kurdish forces, Turkey and the European Union as intermediaries. As we will see, the interests of the adherents to each bloc did not always align perfectly—as in the case of Moscow and Teheran.

The taking of Mosul by the Islamic State on June 10, 2014 had been followed almost immediately by a surge of ISIS forces, supported by Sunni tribal irregulars, toward Baghdad. It elicited a response that, looking back, appears to have reconstituted the contemporary Iraqi state. It consisted of Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani on June 13 issuing a fatwa calling for a "popular mobilization" (*hashad sha 'bi*) by way of "armed jihad" (*al-jihad al-kifahi*) against the hordes approaching from the north. His spokesman read the fatwa during Friday prayers at Karbala, the burial place of Imam Husayn ibn Ali. It read in part: "Citizens capable of bearing arms and of fighting the terrorists in defense of their country, their people, and their holy places must volunteer and join the security forces to achieve the sacred goal." It added that casualties would be rewarded with *shahid* (martyr) status.

This pivotal proclamation registered on several levels. First, in Islamic terms it opposed the legitimacy of a Shiite jihad to the one waged by ISIS. The Egyptian Sunni Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi was not mistaken when he had the International Federation of Muslim Scholars that he led denounce it from Doha the next day. He condemned the declaration as a "sectarian fatwa calling on Iraqis to take up arms against each other." He warned against "declarations capable of leading to a destructive civil war that would rip apart the social and tribal fabric."

Denying that the offensive on Baghdad was led by ISIS, al-Qaradawi treated it as "a revolution against injustice and exclusion by all Sunni who aspire to freedom and refuse to live in humiliation." The communiqué refrained from criticizing al-Baghdadi's organization and swept all anti-Shiite violence under the rug. It confined itself to ratifying the resentment of the Sunni population alienated by discriminatory measures, which al-Qaradawi blamed on Prime Minister al-Maliki as justification for attacking him. However, as the offensive rolled on, the jihadists kept killing Shiites. On June12, they captured some 1,700 recruits on the Camp Speicher military base near Tikrit, most of whom they massacred on the spot. They documented this atrocity with an ISIS propaganda video containing unbearable images,

with a commentary titled, "Message to the whole world, and especially to the Rafidha [heretics] dogs."

On a second level, Ayatollah al-Sistani's fatwa set up a somewhat ambiguous situation: effectively, his "Popular Mobilization" called for all citizens to assemble, without mentioning a specific sect and without using an explicitly Shiite vocabulary. It could just as easily evoke a "homeland in danger" alert the moment that an entity claiming to be legitimate—the Islamic State in this case—sought to destroy and replace a duly constituted Iraq. And manning the "popular mobilization units" that would take arms against ISIS were Christians, Yazidis, Sabians, and even Sunni.

Nevertheless, the fighters were overwhelmingly Shiites. Hence their flags bore distinctive marks and images, sacred portraits of Imam Husayn ibn Ali, of his sainted mother Fatima, and of personages from the line of the Twelve Imams. Commanded by the Qods force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, a good number of units formed the tip of the spear of Teheran's military presence on Iraqi soil. But they also had to contend with a regular Iraqi army and, especially, counterterrorist units trained by the United States, with vectors of influence at least partly from Washington.

On a broader level, the Popular Mobilization embodied the startled awakening of a new Iraq confronted with the mortal peril posed by ISIS. Its first victim would be Prime Minister al-Maliki. Ayatollah al-Sistani pushed him out with a declaration dated July 25, 2014 calling on Iraq's leader to show a "spirit of national responsibility" and stop serving parochial interests. Al-Sistani's declaration laid blame for the Mosul disaster where it belonged: first, there was the corruption in the Iraqi armed forces, overequipped by the United States, but many of whose officers drew their pay without doing their duty.

As prime minister, al-Maliki had alienated the Sunni population so much that it went over to ISIS in response. Led by disaffected Baathist *mukhabarat* (intelligence officers) trained under Saddam, the military arm of the Islamic State had even been able to conduct highly mobile operations mixing conventional and unconventional warfare. That let them inflict a major defeat on the regular troops stationed in Mosul, which had outnumbered them ten to one. All the Iraqis' late-model American equipment had then fallen into jihadi hands. On August 11, 2014, Haider al-Abadi, a Shiite politician also from the Daʿwa party, became prime minister. Consequently, he got the credit for reconquering Mosul in July 2017 and eradicating the major ISIS strongholds.

But even this process, based on a patriotic revival jumpstarted by the fatwa of June 13, 2014, still built the new national identity on stigmatizing the Sunni. After the caliphate's fall in July 2017, the streets of Baghdad were placarded with vast numbers of photos of young fighters (overwhelmingly Shiite) killed at the front fighting ISIS. Mixed among them were portraits of Iran's Supreme Leader Khameini or the Ayatollah al-Sistani. I saw nothing of the kind, by contrast, in Sunni Mosul when I visited in late April 2018. This ambiguous martyrology, expanded to the massacred Camp Speicher recruits with a stamp in their honor, created the new legitimacy for political discourse after ISIS's military defeat.

With the start of campaigning for the legislative elections of May 2018, the images of the martyrs were papered over with masses of giant posters for the seven thousand candidates running for a well-paying spot in the 329-member Council of Representatives. "They substituted the photos of thieves for those of the heroes," went the cynical local joke. The campaign challenge in any case was to build a viable political system on the sacrifice of those who had given their lives in the fight against ISIS. But translating the balance of power that grew out of the Popular Mobilization movement would be left up to the future representatives.

However, in its narrowest sense, Popular Mobilization offered the groups most favorable to Teheran a chance to advance their pawns by capitalizing on the electoral dividends that came with having taken part in the fighting. And it let them measure themselves against their opponents that were closest to Washington. In fact, Iraq presented a paradox, being detached from the heightened American-Iranian antagonism peaking with the Trump presidency. These two enemies, both of which had invested considerably in efforts to revitalize the Shiite community, actually collaborated here after a fashion.

As Luluwa al-Rachid, one of the finest experts on Iraq, wrote in her article "Iraq after the Islamic State" (*Notes de l'IFRI*, July 2017), "On Iraq territory the two competing outside powers more or less seemed to have agreed on a duopoly . . . in dividing up security tasks and zones of influence." Thus, the United States, beginning in 2003 with its invasion of Iraq, had set up, equipped, and trained the special forces of the Anti-Terrorism Service. By the time of the counteroffensive against ISIS after the summer of 2014, it fielded a force of roughly ten thousand seasoned fighters. Reporting to the prime minister, these forces bore the brunt of the combat that defeated the jihadists in 2017.

In effect, they fulfilled the role of a patriotic national army. By contrast, the Popular Mobilization militias were ten times larger. While they were nominally under the authority of the prime minister, in the field they obeyed numerous commanders representing opposing, perpetually renewed factions of the Shiite politico-religious spectrum. Its gradations ranged from groups that were most aligned with Iran to ones linked to the Americans. Its components also differed, ranging from opportunistic groupings of impoverished young people ready for a fight to established militias knitted together by ideology and paramilitary training. Finally, they centered on the oldest Shiite Islamist force, the Daʿwa party, as well as the major families of the Great Ayatollahs and the *marjʿiyya*—the spiritual authority guiding the community under the direction of Ayatollah al-Sistani in Najaf. The challenge posed by the parliamentary elections of May 2018 was in refereeing between these tendencies. Their various representatives were candidates on competing lists, and building the majority coalition that would emerge from the polling booths to govern the country—now again the frontline state par excellence between Iran and the United States—would be their task.

Since 2005, the Daʿwa party has given Iraq its three prime ministers—Ibrahim al-Jaafari (2005–2006), Nouri al-Maliki (2006–2014), and Haider al-Abadi (2014–2018)—making it the womb and the nursery of the country's current leaders. Daʿwa was founded in the late 1950s under the aegis of Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr to oppose the secularization of society at the time, particularly the emergence of a powerful communist movement. Many Daʿwa leaders were the offspring of ulemas and its rank and file came from the impoverished suburbs crammed with migrants from the country's rural south attracted by promises and illusions of taking their share of the oil revenues.

Strongly influenced by Muslim Brotherhood doctrine, Daʿwa back then acted like a global Islamist party, without a Shiite axe to grind. It prioritized the fights against secularism and socialism. In its ranks, it could count a number of technocrats from the pious middle classes but also from among the clerics. When the Baath regime came on the scene, persecution of the party intensified and many of its cadres were executed. It had to go to ground, as did the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood during the Nasser era. When Daʿwa came out in support of Khomeini, it was hounded all the more vigorously.

The regime assassinated Baqir al-Sadr on April 9, 1980, causing the other leaders to flee to Teheran. Later that year in September, Saddam Hussein

started the eight years' war against Iran, and on November 17, 1982, Iran created a Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq from among the party's exiles and prisoners of war. It was led by the head of another great line of ayatollahs, Mohammad Baqir al-Hakim. Brought to heel in this way, Daʿwa went through a transformation that saw it gradually distance itself from the neighboring state. Its cadres left for Damascus, then London and Washington at the end of that decade.

Saddam's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 made the Baʾathist regime Washington's enemy number one, where before it had been an ally of the West in containing Iranian expansion. This would favor Daʿwa's evolution toward a nationalism that left room for accommodation with the United States and the non-Islamist opponents that started the Iraqi National Congress in 1992. It was during the 1990s that the party transitioned to promoting representative democracy in a push to move beyond sectarianism. But organizing a consensus among the different factions whose leaders had gravitated into Daʿwa's orbit over the years became a primary challenge. That they fluctuated between the Teheran and Washington poles of attraction only added to the difficulty.

The two main tendencies within Daʿwa revolved around the major lineages of Iraqi ayatollahs, the Sadr and the Hakim. The former counts in its ranks Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, Daʿwa's authority figure. But even more prominent was his cousin Mohammad Sadiq, the revered grand ayatollah who rose up against the regime of Saddam Hussein, only to be killed on his orders on February 19, 1999. He had a son, Muqtada al-Sadr, founder in 2004 of the Mahdi Army, a cluster of Shiite militias that opened a second front against the American occupier already battling the Sunni uprising (see above p. 93 on these events).

Hunted by the United States forces, Muqtada al-Sadr, born in 1973 in a Baathist Iraq cut off from the world, left to complete his education at Qom in Iran between 2007 and 2011. In 2012, he renounced all violence and organized his partisans in "peace brigades." They guarded the Shiite holy places threatened by Sunni jihadists, then joined the Popular Mobilization against ISIS in 2014. Very well established in Sadr City, a poor suburb of Baghdad, and in the country's south, Muqtada al-Sadr benefited from the immense auras of the ayatollahs Mohammad Sadiq and Muhammad Baqir. He stayed in step with the increasing strength and aspirations of a small but growing Shiite middle class. In March 2016, he organized a sit-in outside the capital's

Green Zone, the protected grounds where the administrative offices and homes of the leaders were located, in a protest against corruption.

In July 2017, Muqtada al-Sadr paid a visit to the Saudi and Emirati crown princes Mohammad bin Salman and Mohammad bin Zayed. These repositionings earned him criticism from Iran but allowed him to build up a nationalist popularity in a country exhausted by wars. The population wanted to live in peace and prosperity, and this spirit manifested itself in the hundreds of thousands of people who participated in the rallies he organized. Al-Sadr's inclusiveness went so far as putting up a joint slate for the 2018 elections with the Iraqi Communist Party, only yesterday an object of hatred (*Sa'iroun*—"On the march").

I interviewed one of these won-over leftist intellectuals, a writer and poet, on April 18 in Baghdad. To my question of whether he was worried about such a pact rapidly turning into that of the wolf with the sheep, he replied that Muqtada's thinking had changed. My host thought that al-Sadr, confronting the failed Islamist project, was convinced of the necessity of building a "civil" state (*madani*) run by a government of technocrats. This alone would be capable of eradicating corruption and making Iraq a regional crossroads at peace with all its neighbors, Sunni and Shiite, rather than a battlefield by proxy between them.

Like the inheritor of the Sadr line and his incongruous evolution, the Hakims also went through changes that revealed the political adaptability of Iraqi Shiism, as well as a certain unpredictability in its ranks. Mohammad Baqir al-Hakim had been one of the chief agents of influence of the Khomeinist regime during Iran's confrontation with its neighbor Iraq. Al-Hakim had directed the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq set up by Teheran in 1982, then led the Badr Brigade (named after the first battle the Prophet won in 624 against the infidels). This fighting unit had been recruited, as we saw above, from among the Iraqi Shiite prisoners of war to fight against Saddam's forces. Reentering his country in May 2003, the day after the American invasion, al-Hakim declared himself ready to compromise with the occupier. This got him assassinated the following August in the holy city of Najaf in a suicide attack ordered by al-Zarqawi.

Al-Hakim's brother Abdul Aziz succeeded him, briefly presiding in December 2003 over the Governmental Council under American supervision. Then the Badr Brigade took over the Ministry of the Interior, leading to numerous complaints of abuses against the Sunni by the death squads it

spawned. A change of name to Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq let the organization move closer to the United States, sealed with a visit by its leader to the White House of George W. Bush on December 4, 2006. But Abdul Aziz al-Hakim fell ill with cancer the following year to which he succumbed in August 2009, exactly six years after his brother's death. His demise laid bare divisions inside his followers, some of whom continued to cultivate a close relationship with Teheran.

In 2010, during the legislative elections, the Badr Brigade split off from the Supreme Council, changing its name to "Badr Organization" under the leadership of Hadi al-Amiri, a Council of Representatives member since 2014 and very close to Iran's Revolutionary Guards. After the fatwa for the Popular Mobilization against ISIS by Ayatollah al-Sistani on June 13, 2014, the Badr Organization became one of the most active in its ranks. It fought fierce battles to chase the Sunni population from the town of Jurf al-Sakhar, located close to Baghdad on the road to Najaf and Karbala. From here, the Sunni had prepared the attacks against Shiite pilgrims. The Brigade also took part in combat on the approach to Mosul but was held back from the city by coalition forces due to its execrable reputation for sectarian excesses.

With Badr on a different tack, the Supreme Council named Ammar al-Hakim, the son of Abdul Aziz, as its leader. Two years younger than Muqtada al-Sadr, al-Hakim was handicapped by his relative youth as well as the lack of his rival's charisma. But he, too, evolved toward adopting a "modern" discourse and emancipating himself from referencing political Islam. Leaving the Supreme Council in December 2017, al-Hakim took with him the majority of its thirty-one representatives and the infrastructure to form the "National Wisdom Movement" (*Tayyar al-Hikma al-Watani*). The word "Hikma" has the same root as Hakim—which signifies "wise"—and appears in verse 269 of the second Koranic sura, The Cow: "And he who is brought wisdom, is brought much Good." In the Shiite interpretation of Islam's Holy Scriptures, the Twelve Imams and their successors, the ayatollahs, are the sole repositories of this wisdom.

Calling for moderation, patriotism, emancipation of women, fostering youth, and consolidation of the state, Ammar al-Hakim signaled a move beyond sectarianism. On April 15, 2018, he told me that he hoped to play a pivotal role in a coalition majority after the following month's election. Two days later, we were watching a procession of his party members on an avenue in the middle-class district of Karrada. It had started at the

trendy café-bookshop Ridha al-Alwan, a contributor to an intellectual renaissance in what had been, before the regional and civil wars, one of the most well-read Arab countries. I was struck by how worldly the marchers looked. Wearing t-shirts and the teal caps of the movement, several women among them sported bleach-blonde hairdos—in total contrast to the processions trailed by scores of chadors, the signature look of political Shiism's street demonstrations. According to Ammar al-Hakim, "No Iraqi Shiite political group is hostile toward Iran, with which we have kinship ties: but the real problem is knowing if Iran is our father, our big brother—or are we merely cousins?"

This question came vividly to my mind again when the results of the legislative elections were announced on May19: Muqtada al-Sadr's "On the March" list came in first with fifty-four seats, ahead of the "Alliance of Conquest"—the "Badrists," led by Hadi al-Amiri and close to Teheran—with forty-seven seats. The "Victory Coalition" of outgoing Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, with a total forty-two seats, brought up the rear. Behind this leading trio, thirty-three other lists divided the remainder of the parliamentary seats among them. It made for very difficult negotiations and also facilitated interventions from abroad.

Muqtada al-Sadr's fairly clear success testified to a nationalist revival. He scored despite the shifts and his anti-American activist past. Though he had stayed in Iran in the holy city of Qom for three years to finish his education, ultimately, al-Sadr distanced himself from Teheran by visiting Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates countries. He stood up forcefully to the corrupt elites and then allied himself with the communists in the election. His victory, first of all, relativized the interference of religion in politics. It also attuned a militant Shiite movement and flock further to democratic logics which previously had been alien to them.

Al-Sadr's victory also marked a quest for neutrality by Iraq, which had to balance the components of its sectarian and ethnic demographics, and did not want to see itself torn apart once more by civil wars stoked by its neighbors. The country, exhausted after thirty-eight years of uninterrupted strife, simply wanted to turn the page. Finally, al-Sadr's electoral success bore witness to voters' receptivity to rhetoric in the fight against corruption—for example, disparaging as "thieves" the elites that divided among themselves the spoils of a drained society and diverted oil revenues to their own benefit. The poor performance of lists led by

former prime ministers witnessed to this disillusionment, as did the low voter participation rate of 44.5 percent, with nearly two-thirds of Baghdad voters abstaining.

In Washington, news of the election results were received cautiously. Muqtada al-Sadr still had a hellish reputation there, even if some think tanks commented favorably on his evolution. Teheran also responded with some bewilderment, having seen its positions in Syria subjected to massive Israeli bombardments ten days earlier (see below). Hence, Qasem Soleimani, the head of the Qods Force of the Revolutionary Guards, was urgently dispatched to Baghdad in the wake of the election. His mission: to keep a governing coalition from being formed that would act against the interests of the "Iranian cousin."

NINE

The Global Stakes in the Fight for the Levant

ON APRIL 11, 2018, the Syrian loyalist army retook the Ghouta outskirts of the capital and then expelled the last jihadists from the adjoining Palestinian camp of Yarmouk on May 21. The push would test the depth and durability of relations first between Syria's Alawite minority in power in Damascus and the Iranian theocracy in Teheran, and second between two societies: one Arab, the other Persian. The defeat of the Sunni insurrection in all its guises—including ISIS and the rest of the rebels—was announced, despite pockets of resistance remaining in the northeast in the Idlib "deconfliction zone" supervised by Turkish military observers, and in the eastern desert.

The end of the two-month offensive against Ghouta was symbolically marked by an American, British, and French missile strike on the Syrian installations suspected of making chemical munitions—some of which might have been used against the town of Douma on April 7, 2018. The Shiite paramilitaries, whether Iranian, Afghan, Pakistani, or Iraqi, had not engaged in the offensive, and neither had Hezbollah. The Russian forces, typically commanding planes, helicopters, or ballistic missile batteries, deployed their ground troops in combat, a rarity. Their involvement was limited to military police troops that enforced ceasefires as areas were reconquered one by one, and then convoyed the defeated rebels to Idlib. Moscow was careful to man this unit specifically with Russian Sunnis, Chechens, Ingush, or Dagestanis from the northern Caucasus to reassure the rebels transported under their eyes.

The Syrian Insurrection Is Declared Dead: Tribulations for the West

Iraq's Shiism was highly susceptible to Iranian influence, whether because of the territorial closeness or the prominence of the holy places in Najaf and Karbala for the faithful on both sides of the border. The Alawite minority running Syria, on the other hand, had only a distant relationship with the doctrine and beliefs of Twelver Islam. The connection between Bashar al-Assad's post-Baathist regime and the Islamic Republic was primarily opportunistic. During the 1980s, Damascus served primarily as the transit point for the flows of material support Teheran provided to its Lebanese Hezbollah client.

The growing power of the "Party of God" provided Iran a potent offensive weapon against the Jewish state. Hezbollah had taken up the anti-Israeli "resistance" role that the PLO had dropped after its expulsion from South Lebanon in 1982. It projected Teheran's power into the Near East beyond its own Middle Eastern confines and helped make it more resistant to Western threats over its nuclear program. Then Hezbollah, the Lebanese system's hegemon, shrewdly reconciled itself with the many Christians in the Land of Cedars, with the aim of allying with other minorities in the region to ensure their common survival. They all felt threatened by a Sunni jihadism in full expansion backed by a vast Salafist movement bent on exterminating them.

On May 6, 2018, Lebanese voters went to the polls for the first time since 2009 to elect 128 deputies. Turnout was low at 49 percent compared to 54 percent in 2009. One reason was a very complicated ballot, but distrust of a political class dominated by billionaires shamelessly spreading their money around also ran deep among the public. Widespread disgust with the country's plutocracy touched a nerve during the campaign and helped Hezbollah with its ally the Amal Movement emerge victorious with the maximum number of Shiite votes. Together with its Christian partners in the Free Patriotic Movement of General Michel Aoun and a few others, Hezbollah would have a narrow majority of seats in parliament. But the Christian opponents in the Lebanese Forces led by Samir Geagea achieved a breakthrough in North Lebanon.

Saad Hariri and his Future Movement, however, lost twelve of thirty-three seats in a significant setback. Hariri had lost credibility after a stay

in Saudi Arabia in November 2017, where he had been forced to read a letter on television resigning from the office of prime minister. He later repudiated the resignation, but the damage was done. It was just one more indicator that Levantine Sunnism as a whole was running out of steam after the eradication of ISIS and the collapse of the Syrian rebellion. The Sunni leader of Tripoli and former head of government Najib Mikati ran against Hariri for the prime minister's post reserved to this sect by the Lebanese constitution. Hariri, though weakened, was reelected on May 24 to a third consecutive term in office to keep Riyadh happy.

Hezbollah did not indulge in triumphalism. The Shiite party was more interested in emphasizing its compliance with a consensual framework of democratic institutions over which it exercised hegemony. In an atmosphere of heightened tensions between Israel and the complex Iranian web, Tel Aviv declared emphatically that it would henceforth equate the victorious Hezbollah with the Lebanese state—a statement with an underlying threat. It meant that, if rockets were launched from Lebanon, the Israeli military would strike Beirut directly, rather than getting bogged down in a ground war in South Lebanon as it had in 2006. And in the barrages that were exchanged on May 9 between the Jewish state and the Qods Force, Hezbollah held its fire. It was instead from Syria that rockets flew toward the Golan.

By engaging on Syrian territory starting in late 2012, Hezbollah's Shiite fighters saved what was at the time a faltering Bashar al-Assad regime. However, the rolling defeat of the rebellion from 2015 on was increasingly due to the other units joining the fight on the frontline. The Kurdish militias of the "People's Protection Units" (or YPG) made inroads into ISIS caliphate territory with air support from the Western coalition led by the United States. In Syria's west, Russian planes flying from the Hmeimim base pounded the rebels, who once defeated were transferred under safe conduct to the "deconfliction zone" in Idlib province. This had been negotiated as part of the Astana agreements concluded in 2017.

While Iran was officially a stakeholder, in practice it was really just the Russian and Turkish militaries coordinating to make the process work as designed. The Russians provided security for the convoys of defeated rebels through areas controlled by loyalist troops until their arrival at the designated drop-off area in the zone. The Turks saw to it that once the fighters were in the deconfliction area they did not reenter the fight against loyalist troops. Some of them had served as auxiliaries to Turkish troops during

their incursions into Syria, under the Euphrates Shield operation of 2016–17 and Olive Branch in January–March 2018.

Ghouta, the semi-rural outskirts of Damascus that rebelled in late March 2011, waved the white flag to Bashar al-Assad's army supported by Russian forces on April 11, 2018. The surrender came the day after a last "alleged" chemical attack (see below). Ghouta's trials bear symbolic witness to the evolving situation. They allow us to discern the outline of the political and military steps that will be necessary for setting up the transition phase after the all-but-certain defeat of the rebellion. The timing of the last offensive against the enclave coincided roughly with one launched by Turkish troops against the Kurd-dominated Syrian city of Afrin, which fell on March 18, 2018 after fifty-seven days of combat. The combination of these two battles foreshadowed the impending reorganizations and positioning of the different regional actors. They testified to the growing power in the Levant of a Russia and a Turkey linked in a marriage of convenience, but not one without its problems.

Throughout the conflict, Ghouta had loomed as the most pressing threat to Bashar al-Assad's regime. So close to the capital, the rebels could easily lob shells into it at any time. Long ago a mythical oasis, the suburb was now a poverty belt populated by internal migrants, Palestinian refugees, or members of the lower-middle class chased out of the central city by rising prices during the years of economic liberalization. It was a cauldron of the social problems plaguing Syria generally, making it an ideal receptacle for Salafist preaching, as had recently become the case in the town of Douma (150,000 inhabitants). Here was established one of the rare Levantine strongholds of the ultraconservative Hanbalite school that dominated in Saudi Arabia. In the mid-1990s, its most illustrious preacher, Abdullah Alloush, fled from Syria to Saudi Arabia when he was threatened with imprisonment. There he built contacts and financing networks that would prove invaluable during the civil war for his son Zahran, born in 1971. Jailed on account of his militancy before the Arab Spring, Zahran Alloush was released in the summer of 2011 like many other Islamist activists that would sow division in the ranks of a growing opposition. He then established the main rebel group, the Saudi-leaning Army of Islam, of which he was commander.

In 2013, the Assad regime was losing control of many of Syria's regions. Zahran Alloush now made himself through force and charisma the leader of

a kind of closed-off counter-society with one million members on 116 square miles that adjoined the centers of power. What started out as a refuge for opponents of all stripes wound up transformed into an Islamist citadel. In August 2013, the enclave was the target of a sarin gas attack that had close to 1,400 victims. Western nations failed to agree on a response, leaving the field open to a Russian solution for the (partial) dismantling of the Syrian chemical arsenal.

Financed by Kuwaiti and Saudi Salafist donors, as recounted by Aron Lund in his reference work on Ghouta, "Into the Tunnels" (Century Foundation, December 2016), Zahran Alloush's enclave was a preview of what awaited the country if the rebellion won. It was administered by a judicial counsel of ulemas that strictly applied sharia. And if the Army of Islam had to yield territory to rival Muslim Brotherhood-inspired or jihadist groups, it mercilessly repressed any dissidence. The disappearance on December 10, 2013 of the lawyer Razan Zaitouneh, an icon of the secular resistance who had established a center for women's rights in Douma, was a telltale symptom of the repression. After finding refuge in Douma she had established a center for women's rights.

Torture was routine in the jails in the rebel enclave. Captive Alawites, Christians, and other "heretics" were exhibited in cages to serve as human shields. Zahran Alloush vilified the "Shiite stain" along with democracy. Very longwinded on the Gulf satellite networks and Islamist social networks, the graduate of the University of Medina could hold his own against the most virulent Salafist preachers. However, this did not keep him from collaborating with certain wheeler-dealers linked to the ruling power in a lucrative siege economy. He imported food, then resold it at astronomical markups with the help of corrupt soldiers who controlled the checkpoints or contraband tunnels—just as in Gaza. All the while, as the enclave's strongman, Alloush maintained a low-key coexistence with the regime.

In June 2015, Alloush went to Turkey and Jordan for talks with Western officials. These meetings resulted in the Army of Islam supporting the United Nations peace process known as Geneva III. Meanwhile, he moderated his comments in English-speaking media to present himself as a "pragmatist." He swapped the jellaba and combat fatigues for a gray jacket when appearing on the Arab networks as better suited to this new television audience. In Riyadh, at a meeting of the Syrian National Coalition in late 2015, at Saudi urging Alloush was appointed the opposition's chief negotiator at peace

talks slated to begin early the next year on the shores of Lake Geneva. It would be a first for the representative of a group fighting on the ground.

But, on December 25, 2015, after his return to Ghuta, Alloush was—conveniently—killed with a Russian drone of the Syrian army. His exit from the scene led to the enclave fragmenting, with his fighters battling the "Brigades of the Merciful" (*Faylaq al-Rahman*—"al-Rahman" being one of the ninety-nine names of Allah), a group close to the Muslim Brotherhood and the Turkish-Qatari network, as well as the al-Qaeda offshoot the Al-Nusra Front.

The departed was replaced as negotiator by his younger brother Mohammed Alloush, who lacked his late sibling's charisma. Still, he incarnated the armed Salafist rebellion, the more so since the Army of Islam did not appear on the UN's list of terrorist organizations, unlike ISIS and Al-Nusra. The Geneva talks achieved a ceasefire of several weeks that took effect in February 2016, but the young Alloush had little to contribute to the negotiations. He left them in April when the violence resumed. Nevertheless, he took part the following year in the Astana conference that brought the insurgents and the ruling power together, under the joint auspices of Russia, Turkey and, to a lesser degree, Iran.

In July 2017, Alloush announced the establishment of a "deconfliction zone" in Ghouta. Even if its effects were minimal, it showed that his Saudi sponsors were beginning to look for an understanding with Russia. They could see that the reconquest of Aleppo by the regime signaled the rebellion's certain defeat. Cutting a deal with Moscow that would keep Iranian influence out of post civil-war Syria therefore made sense. In October 2017, King Salman became the first-ever Saudi monarch to visit the Kremlin. The trip marked the start of an unprecedented, broad cooperation, both political and cultural, between two of the largest oil exporters on the planet. Riyadh even considered buying Russian S-400 anti-aircraft missiles, the most advanced in the world. Teheran had been receiving the previous S-300 model since 2016.

Ghouta fell in the first half of April 2018. It set off the repositioning of international, regional, and local actors for the post-war Levant. On the one hand, Russia confirmed its preeminent role on the ground by controlling the evacuation of fighters to Idlib. Less was seen of the foreign Shiite auxiliaries. The symptoms of Syria's army reconstituting its offensive capabilities after years of floundering multiplied. Bashar al-Assad had himself

photographed at the steering wheel of his car on a tour of the reconquered cities. In relaxed attire, he commented on the situation and celebrated the military successes surrounded by soldiers. He was clearly more sure of his power than during his toadying welcome for Vladimir Putin at the Hmeimim base in December.

On the other hand, the enclave's capitulation had been sped up by an "alleged" chemical attack on the town of Douma on April 7. When it ended, some four thousand of the last die-hards of the Army of Islam agreed to be transferred to the Idlib deconfliction zone, as rival rebel factions had been doing in preceding weeks. This attack, after which some forty victims were identified as having been asphyxiated, was interpreted differently by Moscow and Damascus on one side and Washington, London, and Paris on the other. On April 14, the Western coalition launched a punitive missile strike on Syrian targets. Aside from the broadsides about the precise circumstances of the April 7 attack and the gas used, the sequence of the two events would only reveal its full significance with time—between the Western two-step in August–September 2013 and the projection of diverse powers with axes to grind in the future Levant.

In the summer of 2013, the United States, Britain, and France had proved incapable of punishing the Syrian regime after President Obama had drawn a "red line" against the use of chemical weapons. Also, their calamitous acceptance of the Russian offer to dismantle the Syrian chemical arsenal had put the weakness of the Western position on full display, confirming Moscow's leading role. Confronted by the same type of provocation (whatever its exact dimensions or real nature), the three Western powers this time could not walk away. Had they done so, they would have taken themselves completely out of future negotiations on the fate of Syria and the Levant. The tripartite strike of April 14, 2018, of which the Russians were given advance warning, was launched at night. It resulted in no casualties and caused only limited material damage, but it made up for the failure in 2013.

The latest generation of ballistic missiles was deployed for the attack, and France made the first-ever launch of naval cruise missiles from one of its frigates on the high seas. The fireworks were part of a quest for a balance of power that would keep Moscow and its allies from gaining the complete upper hand. All this occurred in a context where the planned delivery of the S-300 to Syria and the S-400 to Turkey changed the situation

in the regional skies. More than two months earlier, on February 10, 2018, a Syrian S-200 had downed an Israeli air force F-16. It marked the first time that Israel's absolute air superiority in the skies over the Near East had been challenged.

For President Trump, the tripartite strike was also a matter of reiterating how much "tougher" he was than his "impotent" predecessor Barack Obama. Previously, on April 7, 2017, Trump had ordered a missile launch against the Syrian air force base at Shayrat, which was suspected of dropping chemicals on the town of Khan Shaykhun, killing ninety-two people. The Organization for the Liberation of Shām (previously the al-Nusra Front) had been holding the town at the time.

From Afrin to Kirkuk: The "Kurdish Tragedy" Revisited

In August 2016, the Turkish army crossed the Syrian border for the first time in what they called the Euphrates Shield operation. The offensive went after two foes, one cyclical—ISIS—and the other structural: the Kurdish YPG militias supported by the West against the jihadists. The Euphrates Shield operation, launched several weeks after the failed coup against President Erdoğan in July, marked a turning point in Ankara's posture toward the Syrian conflict. Until then, it had been determined by ideological considerations linked to a neo-Ottomanism championed by former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, with views along the intellectual line of the Muslim Brotherhood. Supporting the Syrian rebellion to bring a Sunni majority to power in Damascus would thus fit the great enterprise of hijacking the Arab Spring to benefit the Brotherhood. In this, they would have the support of Qatar and Turkey, and the blessings of Barack Obama.

The Syrian Brotherhood would be instrumental as the vector for tilting the Levant toward this ideology. It would dominate the Middle East, shutting out Saudi Arabia on the one hand and Shiite Iran on the other. But General el-Sisi's proclamation in Cairo, Rached Ghannouchi's historic compromise with the secular powers in Tunis, and the split between Tripolitania and Cyrenaica in Libya, which reflected the Qatar-Saudi dispute, changed the regional situation to the scheme's detriment, starting in 2013. At the same time, on Syrian territory, the Shiite auxiliaries entering the arena and Moscow's growing engagement, followed by the rising power of ISIS, had

deepened antagonisms. These developments squeezed the Brotherhood between the jihadist movement and the regime of Bashar al-Assad.

For years, Ankara had turned a blind eye to assorted foreign jihadists crossing the border to join the Al-Nusra Front or the Islamic State. Simultaneously, it allowed trafficking in oil from wells exploited by these organizations. By 2015, this was becoming intolerable. Turkey's allies and partners in NATO were getting hit on their own soil, from Paris to Brussels and from Nice to Berlin, by terrorists who had moved freely back and forth across the Turkish borders. Security camera footage showing Hayat Boumedienne, the wife of Amedy Coulibaly, the Paris Hypercacher murderer, going through the controls at Istanbul Airport on January 9, 2015, just before her husband carried out the slaughter, spoke volumes. The perpetrators of the November 13 massacres in Paris and the Stade de France had also traveled unimpeded to Europe from Raqqa via Istanbul. There were many other cases like these.

This laxness in border control had an unintended consequence for Ankara: a new military actor would appear on the scene in the form of the Kurdish YPG ("People's Protection Units") militias based in the Rojava, the northern Syrian provinces that butted up against the border. The Kurds went after ISIS, for which they got the immediate blessings of the West. Little wonder, for when ISIS took Mosul in June 2014 before Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's proclamation of the caliphate, the Kurds alone had stood their ground and put up a fight against the jihadist surge, while other forces fled in disarray. However, Erdoğan regarded the YPG as a threat to Turkey's national sovereignty, given its symbiotic ties with the PKK, the Kurdish irredentist party, labeled a terrorist organization both by the United States and the European Union, on Turkey's side of the border.

Turkish repositioning in response to the changing Syrian equation had domestic, regional, and global reasons. Turkey blamed the failed coup d'état against President Erdoğan on Fethullah Gülen, an exiled preacher living in the United States. When the United States refused to extradite him, relations with Washington turned frosty. On the other hand, a spectacular thaw set in with Moscow. On the ground, this led Ankara to abandon the rebels holding Aleppo, allowing the loyalist Syrian troops to retake the northerly metropolis in December 2016. Meanwhile, the Turkish army, having crossed the border in the Al Bab and Jarabulus sectors—under the Euphrates Shield operation—repulsed ISIS there to the satisfaction of the Western capitals.

But then Turkey took advantage of these gains to establish Syrian Arab rebels beholden to it in the space separating the two eastern Kurdish Rojava provinces from Afrin province to the west. This way Turkey blocked the creation of a "Kurdish corridor" in the making, which might have extended all the way to the Mediterranean coast.

In January 2018, with the reconquest of Mosul and Raqqa, the overall military picture had changed drastically. The Islamic State no longer controlled any territory to speak of, except for some desert areas where seminomadic tribes protected the fighters who had escaped. However, two thousand American and two hundred French Special Forces personnel were embedded in Syria's northeast with the Kurdish YPG militias. Their priority objective was tracking down ISIS fugitives and providing early warning of their attacks. European fear of homegrown jihadists still on the run returning to cause mayhem posed a prime security challenge. In this context, the dozens of prisoners originally from France and neighboring countries held by the Kurds were an intelligence bonanza and an ace in the hole for the Kurds. Major figures of the French jihad—Adrien Guihal, Thomas Barnouin, Emilie Koenig—were in Kurdish hands in the spring of 2018.

Ultimately, the presence of American and French military assistance, while the Bashar al-Assad regime, the Russians, and the Shiites were occupied with taking back a growing part of Syrian territory, meant that eradicating ISIS had been a Western success. When French Minister of Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian affirmed this in December 2017, he also critcized the Russians for "appropriating" that success. Russia, however, kept observers in Afrin as liaison officers with the YPG. In times past, the historical militant Kurdish movement, tinged with communist ideology at the start, had forged relationships first with the Soviet and then the Russian intelligence services.

When the United States announced that it would set up a thirty-thousand-man border guard unit among the Syrian Democratic Forces (mostly Kurds), Erdoğan went ballistic. On January 15, 2018, he fulminated: "A country [the United States] that we call an ally intends to form a terror army on our borders! What will it target if not Turkey? Our mission is to strangle it before it sees the light of day." On January 19, the Russian observers left Afrin, and the next day the Turkish Olive Branch offensive rolled into action. As had been the case with the earlier Euphrates Shield operation, the majority of Olive Branch troops were Syrian insurgents of various stripes, equipped

and paid by Ankara, most of them transferred from the Idlib deconfliction zone through Turkish territory. They were a ragtag group, from leftovers of the Free Syrian Army to jihadists—who engaged in defiling the corpse of a female Kurdish fighter.

Taken on March 18, Afrin was pillaged in a logic of "ethnic cleansing" in which Arab rebels replaced Kurds. The Turkish flag was raised side by side with the Syrian rebel flag on the province's highest peak, Mount Barsaya. However, this offensive differed from the earlier one. Then, the fight against ISIS and expelling it from the border area had been the first priority, before the Turks pivoted to attack the Kurdish militias. This time, Turkish troops aimed squarely at the Kurds from the start. By controlling this ground, Turkey dealt a fatal blow to the Kurdish corridor toward the Mediterranean, a prerequisite for an independent state emerging by opportunistically taking advantage of the regional chaos.

The Olive Branch operation could only have rolled into action with the discreet assent of the Russians, rulers of the air space. But it roused Bashar al-Assad into issuing vigorous protests for Ankara's violating the border and affirming their, as well as the rebels', sovereignty over Syrian land. The offensive also brought reprimands from Teheran, despite Iran being a party to the Astana process. A convoy of militias loyal to Damascus approaching the area to show solidarity with the Kurds was forced to retreat under fire by the Turkish army and its Arab irregulars. For Moscow, the taking of Afrin proved an embarrassment. Its foreign affairs minister mused publicly that by April 9, control of the conquered region should be returned to the Syrian government. This earned him the following rebuffs by Erdoğan the next day: "When the time comes, we will personally turn it over to the people of Afrin, but this is our business not Mr. Sergei Lavrov's and we will decide when." The nationalist Turkish press glorified the military operation as one aimed "against America and Russia."

Five days later, Turkey's agreeing to Western air strikes on Syria to punish its use of chemical weapons at Douma showed just how complicated the relations between Ankara and Moscow could get. President Erdoğan made no secret of his intention to order another offensive against the YPG in the eastern Rojava provinces, regardless of the presence of American and French troops there. It was in this strained situation that he called the parliamentary and presidential election for June 2018, which had initially been scheduled the following year. Clearly he wanted to capitalize at the polls

on the nationalist excitement that the attack on Afrin and its capture had stirred up, to give him a permanent hold on the powers he wanted for fully presidentializing his regime.

This process fit in with the modulation of the Turkish position in the Middle East game since the Arab Spring of 2011. In an interview in Istanbul on May 22, 2018, former prime minister Ahmet Davutoğlu told me that a decisive shift occurred in the summer of 2013. He was referring to the simultaneous arrival of ISIS as a significant force in the Syrian insurrection, Marshal el-Sisi's proclamation in Egypt that dismissed the Muslim Brotherhood president Morsi, and the failure of the Western coalition to strike Damascus in retaliation for the use of chemical weapons in Ghouta. With that, the vision of "strategic depth" that this erstwhile academic had elaborated since 2001 in his book of the same title became untenable. Davutoğlu had argued that Turkey should project its influence regionally through business dynamism and abandon its military focus on borders difficult to defend for lack of natural barriers (except the mountains straddling the frontier with Iran).

The coup d'état in Egypt knocked the Muslim Brotherhood out of the game as a key player in the future of the uprisings, thus disappointing its supporters in Ankara and Doha. For Bashar al-Assad, according to Davutoğlu, the failure of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt signaled that he, too, could win in the end. It was an impression reinforced both by the inarguable division between ISIS and the other rebels, as well as the West's reluctance to strike Damascus in September 2013 after the gassing of Ghouta. Therefore, Turkish regional policy, making a virtue of necessity, would gradually return to a more traditional statist idea of defending its border militarily. It translated into a nationalist reaffirmation based on the core values of the Atatürk model. From then on, the Atatürk model would be revived with a more Islamized vocabulary, but with a Kemalist grammar, as spoken by President Erdoğan. This is eloquently shown in the book by Jean-François Pérouse and Nicolas Cheviron: *Erdoğan: A New Father for Turkey?* (2017).

In the repression following the putsch attempt of July 15, 2016, disciples of Fethüllah Gülen were purged from all positions of power they had conquered in the state apparatus, the media, and universities. It eliminated those Atatürk's most virulent haters within the Islamist movement and allowed the AKP in power to reappropriate him by substituting in Erdoğan.

In May, during the campaign leading up to the 2018 elections, on Istanbul's walls I could see how the image of the "Father of the Turks" was monopolized by Erdoğan's election propaganda. It went so far as putting displaying images of both men side by side, with their resemblance enhanced by a few Photoshop tweaks. The incumbent president was re-elected on June 24 in the first round, with 52.5 percent of the vote.

In this situation, the Syrian question was no longer so much one of the rebellion's victory led by the Muslim Brothers—henceforth inconceivable—but of securing the border. The unity of the Turkish nation-state is a function of Syria's long-term territorial integrity, I was told at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on May 21, 2018 in Ankara. It involves an imperative: an autonomous Kurdish region in northeast Syria's Rojava is a threat to Turkey's sovereignty, and fighting it is the main driver of Turkish policy. This is the starting point for all discussions on whether to keep Bashar al-Assad in power or not, according to the balance of power on the ground and between the big powers.

For the Kurds, the bottom line of the part they played in eradicating ISIS, which let them become a valuable partner of the West, was a bitter one. It put into question their secular ambitions of building a state of forty million Kurdish speakers scattered across southeastern Turkey, northern Syria and Iraq, and northwest Iran. Already at the end of World War I, the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres had provided for creating such as state, but it was annulled under military pressure by the victorious Turkish armies led by Atatürk. The Treaty of Lausanne followed in 1923—with no mention of a Kurdish state. The century-long guerrilla war waged by the Peshmergas "with no allies but their mountains," as the local saying goes, had been marked by multiple massacres but also an obstinate refusal to give up, as recounted in Gérard Chaliand's reference work *The Kurdish Tragedy*, published in 1992. With the turmoil and then the elimination of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, these hopes rekindled, with de facto autonomy for the Iraqi Kurds in Duhok, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah starting in 1992. A high point came with the formation in 2005 of the quasi-independent Kurdistan Regional Government, based in Erbil.

But fratricidal conflicts, after a bloody phase during the 1990s, had deepened a split between the PDK (Kurdistan Democratic Party) and the UPK (Kurdistan Patriotic Union). The former was dominated by the Barzani family which ruled in the Erbil and Duhok region, and the latter

by the Talabani clan based in Sulaymaniyah. These divisions matched up with different regional alliances. The PDK maintained good, mostly commercially based relationships with Turkey. It would seem paradoxical, in retrospect, that during his first years in power in Ankara beginning in 2003, Erdoğan initiated a process of reconciliation with the Kurds as followers of Sunni Islam.

At the same time, the Islamic-conservative AKP sidelined Atatürk-style hypernationalism. Large Turkish capital inflows helped Erbil become a distribution point for merchandise made in Anatolia for the Iraqi and Iranian markets. Both were cut off from international business, the first because of security concerns and the second under the embargo on financial transaction imposed by the American D'Amato-Kennedy Act of 1996. Thanks to this bonanza, Erbil went through a remarkable development on a model inspired by Dubai, if on a different scale. On the other hand, Talabani's UPK maintained closer relations with Teheran, the PYD in Syrian Rojava, and the Turkish PKK. The opening in November 2013 of a Kurdish oil pipeline linking the Kurdistan oil fields to the Turkish port of Ceyhan brought a financial windfall to the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). But then the ongoing decline of the price of crude, followed by Baghdad's refusal, starting in February 2014, to pay Erbil its 17 percent share of Iraq's oil revenues when the KRG started to export oil directly, provoked an economic crisis. Its consequences still reverberated in 2018, with investments drying up, housing projects deferred, and so on.

The Iraqi army in Mosul collapsed under the ISIS onslaught in June 2014. But Peshmerga fighters (especially the YPG from Rojava), after putting up a fairly robust resistance, set the stage for the Kurds to then repel the jihadists who had advanced to the gates of Kirkuk. This was disputed, de facto annexed ground, whose oil resources were, to Baghdad's chagrin, extracted and exported. The conflict that this created with the capital reached its height in the summer of 2017, when the tide turned against the Kurds.

While the reconquest of Mosul in July had allowed the central Iraqi government to reassert its authority, backed militarily by the Popular Mobilization units, an in-your-face referendum for Kurdish independence, organized in September on the initiative of Masoud Barzani, the storied president of the KRG, got a 92 percent "for" vote. Russia was alone in supporting the result, obviously because of its interest in tapping Kirkuk's oil, with the Russian company Rosneft in October set to take a 60 percent

interest in the Ceyhan oil pipeline. Baghdad refused to recognize the vote; in fact, it retaliated by prohibiting international flights to and from Erbil airport, which aggravated the economic crisis there. The international community, worried about a new trouble spot emerging, did not endorse this unwelcome polling, turning these triumphal results into a dead letter.

The following October 17, at the funeral in Sulaymaniyah for Jalal Talabani, former president of the Iraq federation and legendary Kurdish nationalist, the UPK's Peshmergas, which controlled Kirkuk with the PDK, agreed to withdraw from the area. They would be replaced by the Iraqi army and Popular Mobilization units. The withdrawal occurred under combined pressure from Baghdad and Teheran—monitored by Qasem Soleimani, the Iranian commander of the Qods Force. In April 2018, the voters I met in Erbil were getting ready to participate unenthusiastically in the election for choosing representatives for the Majlis, Iraq's unicameral legislature, when the vast majority of them had voted for independence just a few months before.

Already weakened in Iraq, the Kurds also had to fend off attacks by Turkish troops in northern Syria. With the grand reorganization of the Levant getting under way after the demise of the ISIS caliphate and the coming defeat of the Syrian rebellion, they now faced a situation not all that different from the one they experienced in the Ottoman empire after World War I. Then, the Kurds' national aspirations had been acknowledged by the Treaty of Sèvres, only be dashed under military pressure from Atatürk. That failure had been formalized in the Lausanne Treaty. Now, a century later, a similar set of exceptional openings offered the Kurds the prospect of achieving their ambition. These consisted, first, of the collapse of Saddam's Iraq, the key role they had played in checking ISIS in 2014, and then their destroying it in Raqqa in 2017. But once again, they overestimated their strength when they staged the September referendum. The states making up the region, Iran, Iraq, and Turkey, overcame their mutual antagonisms to block the Kurds' independence project, each seeing it as an existential threat. Like Atatürk in the 1920s, Erdoğan had brought military pressure to bear with the Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch operations.

And the great powers, from Moscow to Washington to Europe, were not prepared to send their soldiers to die for a notional Kurdish state, even if they were grateful for services rendered against ISIS. This reluctance crystallized in President Trump's announced intention in late March 2018 to bring U.S. soldiers home from Syria. By then, United States production of

oil and gas from shale was booming, once again making it self-sufficient in, and even exporting, hydrocarbons. It therefore made less sense by the day for the White House to intervene with boots on the ground in the chaotic Middle East. The enormous expenditures in lives and treasure on the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq since the start of the twenty-first century with mixed results had left their mark.

Like his predecessor Barack Obama, and despite diverging assessments, the forty-fifth American president delegated to the regional players the responsibility for maintaining or modifying the local balances. Obama had wanted to engage in the consolidation of the Muslim Brotherhood supported by Qatar and Turkey, and in the reintegration of Iran in the international scene, seeing the outlines of a new world order asserting itself in the Arab Spring. But, far from following through with Obama's plans, Donald Trump placed no trust in these innovative partnerships. He regressed to the fundamentals of American policy, with multiple symbolic gestures in favor of his traditional allies and snubbing for erstwhile adversaries to which his predecessor had been prepared to extend his hand.

Thus, in May 2017, Trump reinstated the anti-terrorist pact with a Saudi Arabia now absolved of the 9/11 attacks. And, on May 14, 2018, he ordered the American embassy in Israel moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem—six days after having pulled out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) treaty of Vienna with Iran.

Iranian Hegemony or Empire with Feet of Clay?

In Vienna on July 14, 2015, the five permanent UN Security Council members plus Germany (the so-called "P5 + 1") and the European Union signed the JCPOA with Iran with regards to its nuclear programs. Teheran gave up uranium enrichment for military purposes for fifteen years, as duly verified by the International Atomic Energy Agency. In return, the economic sanctions linked to its nuclear program and imposed by the UN, the United States, and the European Union would be lifted. The JCPOA was principally the fruit of President Obama's willingness to have Iran rejoin the community of nations. He was convinced that by not treating Iran as a pariah but holding it to account for its actions, a way could be found out of the Syrian morass, given the important backing Iran provided to Damascus. Instead of

a disruptive power, Iran would thus become a stabilizing element in the Persian Gulf, lowering the tensions there. That would also lower the price of hydrocarbons, whose daily exports from the region satisfied one-fourth of the world's consumption.

It was largely for the sake of concluding this treaty that the United States refrained from air strikes in September 2013 after the chemical weapons attack on Ghouta despite Washington having drawn that "red line." And, in fact, in November 2013, the "P5 + 1" and Teheran concluded an interim agreement coinciding with the "moderate" Hassan Rouhani's election to succeed the provocateur Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. When the final act was signed in July 2015, Europe was suffering the full brunt of ISIS violence, with the slaughter in Paris at *Charlie Hebdo* and the Hypercacher supermarket in January, as well as at the Bataclan in November—a year to the day before the Nice massacre on France's National Day of 2016. Confronting the jihadist danger, Washington, like Brussels, sought common ground with Iran and Russia in spite of their differences. And Moscow, which had been all for the JCPOA, seeing it as beneficial for its Iranian ally, in the wake of the treaty signing based its airplanes in September 2015 in Syria at the Hmeimim base in the name of the war against terror. This would be a decisive factor in how the civil war ended.

Raqqa finally fell on October 13, 2017, putting an end to the Islamic State and the ISIS caliphate and significantly reducing the jihadist threat against the West. Four days earlier, President Trump had announced that he would not recertify the JCPOA as required by the United States Congress. In May 2017, during his first overseas trip, he had once again declared Iran to be a terrorist power, falling in line with the vision of his Saudi hosts. On January 12, 2018, he reactivated one of his campaign pledges to "tear up" the JCPOA. Calling it "the worst deal ever negotiated" and likely to lead to a "nuclear holocaust," Trump gave his reluctant partners of the "P5 + 1" 120 days to levy new sanctions against Iran.

On May 8, just as Secretary of State Mike Pompeo arrived in Pyongyang to lay the groundwork for an unexpected meeting between the American and North Korean leaders, Trump announced that he would withdraw from the treaty. He called it "a horrible one-sided deal that should never, ever have been made. . . . It is clear to me that with the rotten structure of the current agreement, nothing will prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon." Consequently, a wide-ranging set of sanctions to prevent doing business

with the Islamic Republic was reimposed. The United States also barred investments from exploiting its hydrocarbons, ordered the closing of air connections opened by European airline companies, and Boeing and Airbus canceled contracts for hundreds of airliners. In fact, it called into question billions of dollars in commitments made after the JCPOA was signed on July 14, 2015.

On the Iranian side, the election of Hassan Rouhani on June 14, 2013 and the perilous situation into which the national economy had been plunged by the sanctions regime had created the opening for concluding the Vienna accord. The former nuclear negotiator from 2003 to 2005 under the Khatami presidency took center stage again after eight years of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Ahmadinejad was notorious as much for his nonstop broadsides against the West as his threats directed at Israel, which he wanted to see "wiped off the map." He also accelerated military programs that were, in his own words, aimed squarely at the Jewish state.

Ahmadinejad's hardline approach had been protested in 2013 by voters, with Ali Khamenei's approval, after he had driven the country's isolation to a point where the survival of the Islamic Republic itself was at risk. However, the balance of power in Iran remained complex and changeable. For one, a president categorized as a reformer had to answer to the Supreme Leader, who was guided by the doctrine of *wilayat al-faqih* (government by the Islamic jurist). He also had to offset the power of the Revolutionary Guards, who were intervening decisively in Syria on the side of Bashar al-Assad, and in Iraq against ISIS while supporting the Popular Mobilization units.

This political equilibrium was made even more fragile by the death on January 8, 2017 of Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani. One of Iran's wealthiest individuals, having cornered the export of pistachios and invested heavily in Dubai, Rafsanjani had also had Khomeini's ear. He was elected president in 1989, serving until 1997. He sanded smooth most of the regime's "ideological" rough edges and backed off from the strategy of "exporting revolution" to neighboring countries. Instead, he advocated practical policies resting on the power of a country with sixty-two million people (risen to eighty million by 2020). For Rafsanjani, attachment to the Shiite identity meant establishing a network of regional alliances to strengthen the defenses of Iranian territory in a fortress mentality; this task took precedence over any doctrinal considerations. The outer ramparts of the Islamic

Republic besieged by its Western enemies ran through where the Shiites and Alawites of the Near and Middle East lived—with Lebanese Hezbollah manning the forward outpost on Israel's border.

For the pragmatists, Ahmadinejad's brinkmanship only produced international economic sanctions that negatively affected the Iranian population, stoking its hostility toward the regime. This hostility was on display in the repeated—and repressed—demonstrations against Ahmadinejad's reelection in 2009, and the uprisings against the high cost of living and massive unemployment in December 2017 and January 2018. The earlier protests—nicknamed the "green wave" after the color of the clothing or headbands the protesters wore—shared an atmosphere reminiscent of the Arab Spring and the "color revolutions" in some former Soviet states. In the regime's eyes, the demonstrations were all equally detestable, as they called into question its legitimacy and way of governing, and they were harshly put down. But this failed to deter the more than a million people who took to the streets. Subsequently, the controversial but reelected president was forced to increase subsidies to strengthen client relationships with the working classes. This deepened the budget deficits, and Supreme Leader Khamenei saw to it that Ahmadinejad was gradually sidelined.

The uprisings of 2017–2018 were different: they were leaderless, they aggregated scattered discontents and they brought out thousands of protesters in many provincial villages where expressions of political dissidence were rare. Among Hassan Rouhani's opponents, those in the holy city of Mashhad, formerly close to his predecessor Ahmadinejad, tried to use the protests against him. They accused him of giving up Iran's nuclear program under the JCPOA framework without getting anything in return for the people. Meanwhile, the president expressed understanding for their economic demands, but left it to the commander of the Revolutionary Guards, General Mohammad Ali Jafari, to restore order. Jafari did so, declaring on January 3, 2018 that the *fitna* (the Koranic term for religious sedition that breaks the unity of believers and imperils Islam) was over. Once again, this showed that the regime military corps remained the repressive authority of last resort for the ruling power.

These events received wide coverage in the American press and encouragement for the protesters. A week later, Donald Trump chose that moment to announce the United States would withdraw from the JCPOA in May unless it was renegotiated. To some observers, it appeared as though the

move had been timed to worsen the deteriorating economic situation bringing people into the street. After all, this was the effect the White House hoped to leverage by reviving the sanctions. In preparation, Iran had suspended all foreign exchange transactions within its borders to prevent capital flight. Still, during the first half of 2018, the Iranian rial lost half its value. The prohibition on acquiring foreign currency affected the middle class directly. Already deprived of travel to the United States due to the "Muslim ban" decreed by President Trump in January 2017, Iranian citizens were left with scant options for leaving the country.

Although the ideological side of the recurring clashes with the West would be downplayed going forward, supporting Hezbollah and Iran's clients throughout the region still made a big dent in the state's budget. The armed support for the Syrian regime has been estimated, in the absence of reliable sources, as costing Iran between six and fifteen billion U.S. dollars annually. The financial drain deprived the population of benefiting from foreign investment and fully enjoying the fruits of oil and gas exports. A principal goal of the JCPOA had been for Iran to get out from under this situation. By redefining Teheran's relations with its neighbors and the international community, the agreement was supposed to derive direct economic benefits and indirect social gains. In return for renouncing its nuclear weapons program for fifteen years, as duly verified by AIEA inspectors, international sanctions would be relaxed and Iran would have the chance to gradually rebuild trust with the Western powers in the P5 + 1.

But the Islamic Republic had yet another iron in its foreign policy fire that gave it some additional breathing room. Since the war against Iraq in 1980, Iran had projected the Revolutionary Guards and especially the Qods Force for special forces operations, mainly in Mesopotamia and the Levant. The president did not wield this weapon. They were under the command of General Qasem Soleimani, the first high-ranking officer in Iran to acquire notoriety and popularity in a state apparatus in which the great names on everyone's lips, especially after 1979, were those of either the Supreme Leader or the ayatollahs.

Two factors combined to create this situation. In domestic politics, the outrageous privileges of the turbaned religious men, the *akhound* ("priests"), were ridiculed by most members of the middle class and a good part of the general public for their greed, corruption, and power-grubbing. This circumstance favored the emergence of a military leader to serve as an alternative

and to act as defender of Iranian nationalism, especially if he had the ideological traits associated with the Revolutionary Guards. In April 2018, near a mausoleum, a mummy was excavated that rumor had it belonged to Reza Shah, the Persian Cossack Brigade general who founded the Pahlavi dynasty and modernized Iran. The oppositional, monarchist, offshore satellite TV channel Manato ("You and Me"), today the country's most popular, some years before had broadcast a serial extolling this authoritarian, anticlerical emperor who reigned from 1925 to 1941. During the winter 2017–2018 demonstrations, the responses to shouts of "Long live Reza Shah" were enthusiastic, and were quickly broken up by the police and the basij (the Iranian Popular Mobilization Forces). It is not a stretch to believe that some circles would emphatically welcome a new general—bearded or not—to save Iran.

Such longing for a saber to confront the turbans made General Soleimani a favorite, all the more since he also incarnated the ethos of the Islamic Republic. For the lowest social levels, these qualities blended with the distributionist capacity of the Revolutionary Guards. They headed powerful, rich foundations (*bonyan*) that owned harbors, airports, factories, businesses, airlines, and shipping companies. Consequently, the Revolutionary Guards' military-industrial complex could sustain with all sorts of subsidies a large, easily mobilized working-class clientele. The Guards' security infrastructure also managed the major supply routes that slipped under the radar of the international monitors. These crossed the borders with Iraq, but especially with the Kurdish Regional Government and with Turkey. This let Iran circumvent the sanctions after they were reimposed by President Trump on May 8, 2018, and were vital for resupplying the populace of Iran.

Qasem Soleimani earned his military spurs by an uninterrupted run of victories against the *takfiri*. This Arab word demonizes Iran's Sunni adversaries as fanatics. *Takfir* means "excommunication" and is also the epithet the Salafists and jihadis hurl at the "heretical" (*rafidha*) Shiites, other apostates, and supposed unbelievers. The pejorative use of the term by Teheran resulted in a solidarity between a host of the minorities, from Christians to Yazidis, persecuted by ISIS. It helped nourish a strong global suspicion that the Sunni world, by fanning the flames of violence, had been radicalized.

The Islamic Republic had come a fairly long way since the first decades of its existence, when it overused an ideological-religious vocabulary to stigmatize its enemies. Back then, it called them "corrupters on earth," condemned Salman Rushdie to death, and applied capital punishment in the

name of the Holy Scriptures. Its principals today, as well as their allies, by a semantic reversal, posed as quintessential victims of global terrorism—symbolized by ISIS—just like the Western populations. On April 16 and 19, 2018, I moderated debates in Arabic in Baghdad on the different phases of jihadism (essentially covering the material in the first part of this book) in a mostly Shiite setting, in which the notion of a strong "cousinhood" with Iran resonated with the audience. Here I found a much more attentive, informed, and receptive audience than in Sunni circles in Mosul three days later. At the Baghdad session, I received as a token of appreciation an encyclopedia of jihad terrorism in the Arabic language, three fat volumes exclusively about Sunni ideologues and activists.

In projecting the image of defender against the *takfiri*, General Soleimani reassured both the devout Shiites that formed the regime's working class clientele and the middle class. In private, members of the middle class readily displayed their agnosticism, if not atheism, and nursed the same dread of ISIS and its ilk as their European counterparts. The bazaars in the Iranian pilgrimage places since 2015 have sold souvenirs of crockery and cloth bearing Soleimani's image. And in a survey of half a million internet users on Iranian New Year (Nowruz) whose results were posted on March 21, 2018 by the moderate conservative *Khabaronline* website, 37.3 percent voted him as the most-liked person. (Soleimani had been up against the chief negotiator with the West, Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammad Javad Zarif [29.9 percent], and the recently deceased local singer Morteza Pashaei [18.2 percent], a composer of treacly, sentimental ditties compatible with the Islamic Republic ideology.)

Beyond the soothing, if not trivial, appearances of this hit parade in the country of the mullahs, Qasem Soleimani in reality constructed a formidable persona embodying the continuity of two decades of projecting Iranian political-military power. While the ISIS caliphate was being eliminated in the fall of 2017 and the Syrian rebellion was on its last legs, he built a regional hegemony by proxy. It was primarily to undermine it that Donald Trump torpedoed the JCPOA on May 8, 2018 as the great reorganization of the Middle East got under way. He hoped that reimposing the sanctions would choke Iran or lead to regime change in Teheran by keeping it from capitalizing on its gains.

This policy was reminiscent of the doctrine that the neocons tried to apply to the Middle East after 2001. John Bolton, national security adviser

from April 9, 2018 until he was fired on September 10, 2019, and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo subscribed to it. At a speech to the Heritage Foundation think tank on May 21, 2018, Pompeo presented a list of a dozen demands addressed to the Iranian power that amounted to demanding its surrender. In his speech, Pompeo attacked the major general by name, saying, "Iran advanced its march across the Middle East during the JCPOA. Qasem Suleimani has been playing with house money that has become blood money. Wealth created by the West has fueled his campaigns." It remains to be seen if its global objectives will be achieved. Or will it end up simply weakening the camp of President Rouhani?

The Washington establishment regarded the head of the Qods Force as embodying the principal adversary of the United States and its allies in the Middle East. They view his methods as expressing in a profound way why they call it a "murderous regime." These perspectives are eloquently rendered in the biographical sketch of the general published under the byline of Dexter Filkins in September 2013 in the *New Yorker*. Filkins's reporting on ten years of American bellicosity in the Middle East earned him the prestigious Pulitzer Prize. His long article titled "The Shadow Commander" depicts Soleimani as the "Iranian operator who reshaped the Middle East." This piece appeared on the day Hezbollah forces coordinated by Soleimani took back the Syrian rebel village of al-Qusayr. From then on, he was tagged as the one "who directed Assad's war in Syria." Filkins's article relied especially on interviews with the chief American policymakers in the region since the turn of the century, as well as leading Kurdish and Iraqi figures who acted as brokers between the "shadow commander" in Teheran and his counterparts in Washington. It drew heavily on sources in Persian, pulled together by the researcher Ali Alfoneh for the conservative American Enterprise Institute think tank for his book *Iran Unveiled* (2013).

Qasem Soleimani was born in 1957 in a village near Kerman in Iran's southeast. Rostam, the mythical hero who held Iran together against multiple enemies, is said to have come from there. He is the central character in the *Book of Kings* (*Shah Nameh*), the national epic written by Ferdowsi around the year 1000. Until his killing by a U.S. drone strike in January 2020, Soleimani was identified alongside the hero in popular propaganda describing him as the "new Rostam." This is the case both on websites close to the regime and even for reporters on the Persian language broadcasts of the Voice of America radio. . . . He was born into a family of poor farmers whose

debts to the government he had to work off from an early age. It is said that his social hatred for the Shah's oppressive power dated from that experience. In 1979, Soleimani joined the Revolutionary Guards after attending sermons by a cleric close to the future Supreme Leader Khamenei. The Guards' logo speaks eloquently of its ambitions: an arm brandishing an AK-47 forms the Arabic word *la*, meaning "no," in the sense of rejecting an unjust order. It is also the first word in the double confession of the Muslim faith: "There is no true god but God and Mohammed is the Messenger of God." This logo rests on the date 1357 written in Persian numbers; in the Hegira calendar, this corresponds to 1979, the year the Islamic Republic was founded, bringing with it the messianic promise of the new world the Revolutionary Guards would spread around the globe topping off the coat of arms. Beneath it, and parallel to the automatic rifle, is written the beginning of Verse 60 of the Koran, from the *Al Anfal* (The Booty) sura: "And make ready your strength to the utmost of your power." The continuation of this text, "to strike terror into the enemies of Allah and your enemies," is the standard reference used by all Islamist movements to justify their violence as "legitimate terror" (see chapter 8 for the rationale given by Sheikh al-Qaradawi, among others, for suicide attacks).

Qasem Soleimani had his baptism by fire against the Kurdish separatist insurrection in northwestern Iran. Then, during the war with Iraq from 1980 to 1988, he distinguished himself by his bravery leading his men in the field. He deplored the massive losses in their ranks, caused by the tactic of sending waves of young recruits through enemy minefields to clear avenues of attack by letting themselves get blown up. Soleimani made first contacts with the leaders of the Iraqi Kurds rebelling against Saddam, as well as with the Badr militia recruited from among returned Iraqi prisoners. These contacts would pay off later when they moved into positions of power after the American invasion of 2003. This demonstrated Soleimani's ability to anticipate geopolitical developments.

His official biography states that in the 1990s Soleimani was posted to his native province of Kerman. He eradicated the heroin trade fed by opium cultivated on the other side of the Afghan border, regularly denouncing the resulting drug addiction and clandestine immigration and fighting them as scourges. He became head of the Qods Force sometime in late 1997—the exact date remains secret, as befits his future role as "shadow commander" of the Islamic Republic's foreign operations. In 1999, under the presidency of the "liberal" Mohammad Khatami, Soleimani was

a signatory to a letter addressed to the president by the generals of the Revolutionary Guards. It warned him to crush the student revolt or else the Guards would intervene directly. When the president complied, it showed who was really in charge.

The "blessed double raid" on 9/11, followed by the American invasion of Iraq in March 2003, opened a pivotal period in Qasem Soleimani's career when he dealt with his American counterparts practically on an equal footing. During this first decade of the century, the interests of Iran and the United States converged on two major fronts: the fight against al-Qaeda and the elimination of Saddam Hussein. In both cases, initial collaboration quickly gave way to renewed confrontation. It highlighted a deep, persistent distrust between the two adversaries and their inability to institutionalize their relations, however conflictual. During the last four months of 2001, a team of Soleimani's agents swapped reams of intelligence with their colleagues in the United States led by Ambassador Ryan Crocker, a top American Middle East hand. The information they shared made it possible to locate or neutralize bin Laden's operators as well as Taliban battalions. This auspicious period came to an abrupt end when George W. Bush, in his January 2002 State of the Union Address included Iran in the "Axis of Evil" (see chapter 3). Any feeling of betrayal they might have had in Teheran did not prevent a resumption of contacts between the same individuals following the American invasion of Iraq.

"Setting up an Iraq Governing Council (the provisional executive installed by the occupier) essentially resulted from negotiations between Teheran and Washington," Ambassador Crocker, who was in charge of the talks, confided to the *New Yorker*. But this cooperation would not last long either, as the Sunni uprising that al-Zarqawi had played a major role in instigating was paralleled by attacks on American interests by various Shiite militias close to the Qods Force. Meanwhile, large-scale intersectarian massacres became commonplace. "Bloodying" the American army was intended to trap it in the Mesopotamian quagmire and help protect the Iran of the aggressive Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

On being elected president in June 2005, Ahmadinejad had relaunched Iran's nuclear program to keep the country from becoming the third domino the American neocons wanted to topple in their "regime change" framework, after the Afghanistan of the Taliban and the Iraq of Saddam Hussein. On the ground, Qasem Soleimani was the efficient instrument for

implementing this policy, which would lead to the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq in 2011. This last episode—a campaign promise by Barack Obama—could not have been accomplished had the government of Nouri al-Maliki not been constituted in December 2010. The Qods Force commander must be seen as having had a hand in it, if the Iraqi Shiite and Kurdish leaders involved in the operation are to be believed.

When the American GIs pulled out of Iraq, in effect Washington paradoxically turned over that country's future to Teheran in a kind of joint-control arrangement in which the United States acted as the junior partner. No doubt the perception of Iran as all-powerful was at the root of Prime Minister al-Maliki's Shiite hubris. We saw earlier how he alienated the Sunni population and how this helped clear the way for ISIS inroads, leading to their conquering Mosul in June 2014 and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi proclaiming the caliphate. Such are the limits of a strategy of manipulating political actors by the men in "the shadows," as incarnated by the Qods Force. Iran had to reinvest massively in the Popular Mobilization Units after Ayatollah al-Sistani's call to arms of June 13, 2014. And Qasem Soleimani had to personally set foot on the Iraq battlefield to contain the ISIS surge. While he generaled the counteroffensive on the ground, the United States bombed the jihadists from the air. It was the latest in the series of improbable plot twists in the Iranian-American collaboration in Mesopotamia.

This interaction once more would come up short in neighboring Syria. In Iraq, a majority Shiite population had a bias toward "cousinhood" with Iran, which found uncounted numbers of supporters there. But the decisive intervention by the Qods Force, starting in the second half of 2012, for saving the regime of Bashar al-Assad from collapse played out in a totally different context. In the Iranian vision, Damascus and Beirut—through Hezbollah—constituted, as we noted earlier, the Islamic Republic's forward line of defense on the border with Israel. The Shiite party's ability to incarnate the "resistance" against the Jewish state, after the PLO's eclipse in the mid-1980s, was a trump card for Teheran. It helped greatly in mobilizing support for itself in a massively Sunni world that was as leery of Persia as it was of the Shiites. But the direct involvement of Qasem Soleimani's men and of Hezbollah on Syrian territory, and their decisive role in turning the tide against the rebels, later changed for the worse how Iran and its allies stacked up in global Sunni opinion.

As we saw earlier, the Arab media in the Gulf raged against Hezbollah when it took the village of al-Qusayr in the summer of 2013, whereas, in 2006, they had sung hosannas to its "heroic" role in the Thirty-Three-Day War against Israel. However, the priority on fighting ISIS while it constituted a major threat for Europe, with terrorist acts on European soil crescendoing between 2015 and 2017, had lowered the intensity of the confrontation between a Moscow-Teheran axis supporting Damascus and the NATO members that initially supported the rebellion. But with the destruction of the Islamic State caliphate in 2017, first in July when Mosul was seized, then in October following the fall of Raqqa, the two antagonistic blocs resumed their face-off for determining Syria's future.

The key issue was no longer so much the continuity of the Bashar al-Assad regime, as it was already confirmed—even if in a whisper—in the name of political realism and by the trend in the military situation. Instead, it was what role Iran would play in it. This problem crystallized with the American withdrawal from the JCPOA on May 8, 2018. It was followed the next day by hostilities between Israel and Qods Force elements deployed on Syrian territory. However, this decision put the ball into Russia's court, which had positioned itself as the principal actor in the field throughout the conflict and therefore now found itself in the hot seat.

From "Russia's Moment" to Putin's Dilemma with His Regional Allies

For Vladimir Putin, the main actor in Syria, Russia's involvement is the linchpin of his foreign policy and the key to restoring the country's great power status on the international scene after the USSR's disappearance. Even when the annexation of Crimea in March 2014 created a major diplomatic crisis that ended with Russia's isolation and condemnation by UN General Assembly Resolution 68/262 (with Israel abstaining), it did not deter him. We saw already how the Kremlin walked away with a strategic victory in the summer of 2013 by convincing the United States, the United Kingdom, and France to refrain from any strike against Bashar al-Assad's regime in the wake of the Ghouta sarin gas attacks. The Western nations even acquiesced in collaborating with him in the destruction of most of the Syrian chemical weapons stockpile.

This operation, which saved the Syrian president, as explained to me by Yevgeny Primakov in 2014, had strengthened Moscow's hand, and would be followed up with an explicit increase in military power. It stood in stark contrast to the American deployment in Iraq, extremely costly both in money and lives, or the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan that had sounded the death knell of the USSR. This time, Russia devised an effective political economy tailored to its intervention. On the ground, it took the shape of a bargain-basement infantry under Iranian command. In addition to a core complement of one to two thousand Qods Force troops, some ten thousand irregulars of mainly Arab, Afghan, or Pakistani Shiites, each of them paid an estimated eight hundred U.S. dollars monthly, gradually joined the fight in Syrian territory, starting in the second half of 2012—along with Hezbollah.

From September 30, 2015 on, the thirty-plus Sukhoi fighter planes based at Hmeimim became the offensive's crown jewel, the game changer of the conflict. The Russian pilots and hardware also cost much less than their American, or even British or French, equivalents. Russian tactics of bombing the rebel zones, unconstrained by public opinion or human rights organizations, were effective in wresting territory from rebel control. As Russia intervened, their forces benefited from a dual godsend: the signing of the JCPOA at Vienna in July 2015, which (temporarily) lowered tensions between the West and Iran, and the global export of jihadist violence during this period. It diverted the world's attention and let the Russians argue that they were participating in the global war on terror, which got them a pass when they set up their air base in Syria.

2018 saw ISIS wiped out as a territorial entity and the United States under Donald Trump take a newly aggressive stance resting on a strengthened alliance with Israel and the Saudi bloc. The American withdrawal from the JCPOA on May 8 underscored that. Taken together, these developments changed the terms of the regional equation. They forced Russia into a complex juggling act to keep its lead role in the Syrian affair. In effect, Vladimir Putin had build a system of links to four partners—Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran—which, however, were hostile to each other to varying degrees. And even their relationships with the Kremlin were subject to all sorts of uncertainties.

Diplomatic relations with Israel had been cut because of the Six-Day War from June 1967 to October 1991, two months before the fall of the USSR. After this era of the cold shoulder during which the Soviets sponsored

the PLO, the thaw set in with startling speed when Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000. The one-million-strong, Russian-speaking immigrant minority in Israel that makes up 20 percent of the population proved to be particularly influential. Their Knesset representatives were key supporters of Benjamin Netanyahu, who made the flamboyant, Moldavia-born Avigdor Lieberman his minister of defense (until the latter would become his chief critic and deprive him from his capacity to lead the Israeli government after the 2019 Knesset elections). Trade between the two countries increased exponentially in multiple categories, from twelve million U.S. dollars in 1991 to 2.5 billion U.S. dollars in 2017, especially in high-tech goods and weaponry. Thanks to Israeli engineers, who frequently were USSR émigrés, the Russian drone industry was "revived," according to Igor Delanoe, author of the painstakingly documented book *Russia: the Stakes in the Return to the Middle East* (2016).

In 2016 and 2017, the Israeli prime minister traveled at least seven times—officially—to Russia, where the Jewish community still plays an outsized role among the economic and political elites. From May 9, 2017, after meeting with Vladimir Putin in Moscow, Netanyahu let it be known that their talks focused on the need to keep Iran from filling the vacuum left by the eradication of ISIS with a "radical Shiite Islamic terror." This was just when the Western coalition's offensive against ISIS was kicking off. He pressed the Kremlin to keep Iran from gaining permanent facilities in the country, recalling that the control of the Golan Heights (unilaterally annexed by Israel in 1981 and just forty kilometers from Damascus) was a nonnegotiable security issue for the Jewish state.

When I took part on January 29, 2018 in the annual academic conference held by the Institute of National Strategic Studies (INSS) in Tel Aviv, I learned that Prime Minister Netanyahu, who just then happened to be in Moscow, was there primarily to deal with air space and ballistics topics. The Russian military presence in Syria, in effect, called into question Jerusalem's hegemony over the regional air space and required complex adjustments between the two capitals. In November 2015, after the Turkish air defenses shot down a Russian Sukhoi fighter over the border with Syria, Moscow set up new S-400 ground-air missile batteries near Latakia. They covered a vast space stretching from southern Israel to the Incirlik air base in southern Turkey, from where the NATO planes took off. The two general staffs set up a coordinating mechanism for avoiding air-space conflicts. The shooting

down in February 2018 of an Israeli F-16 by a Syrian S-200 missile, even if due to pilot error, illustrated perfectly the white-hot nature of this issue. The nonstop Israeli bombings of Hezbollah targets and positions of the Qods Force in Syria only confirmed this in the following months, especially on April 9 and 26, when several Iranian advisors were killed.

The night of May 9, 2018, twenty rockets, apparently launched by General Soleimani's men, missed the Israeli bases they were targeting on the Golan Height. The day before, Donald Trump had announced the United States's withdrawal from JCPOA and the reactivation of sanctions against Iran. On the day of the attack, Prime Minister Netanyahu had spent ten hours in Moscow with Vladimir Putin. In addition to the bilateral meeting, he also attended the military parade celebrating the anniversary of the Allies' victory in World War II, as he had the year before. The symbolic stakes of the event, in which the parading masses carry portraits of relatives killed during the "Great Patriotic War," are high for the Russian ruling power's legitimacy. Netanyahu's presence at the parade was all the more significant because Western leaders no longer attended due to the sanctions imposed on Moscow following its annexation of the Crimea in 2014 (which Israel did not abide by).

After inspecting the hardware delivered by Russia to Syria and more, Netanyahu remarked on the sacrifices of the Red Army and its half-million Jewish soldiers, evoking the lessons drawn from the need to "stand up in time against a murderous ideology." He went on to say that "73 years after the Holocaust, there is a country in the Middle East, Iran, which is calling for the destruction of six million more Jews." Before leaving for Jerusalem, hours before the massive air strikes on Iranian targets in Syria by twenty-eight of his planes in retaliation for the Golan attack, he told the press he was sure the Kremlin would not try to limit Israel's freedom to operate in the region.

For the Jewish State, the strike was the largest aerial campaign over Syria since the October 1973 war (a timeframe that overlaps with this book's). For the Iranian side, the rocket attack on Golan was the first attack it launched directly instead of having Hezbollah carry it out (the party was busy with forming the Lebanese government following the Sunday May 6 elections). The initiative for what was a major strategic escalation was easily pinned on Teheran. In fact, twenty sites of the Qods Force would be destroyed the next night with not a word from the Russians except Foreign Minister Lavrov calling the day after for negotiations and deconfliction.

On Monday May 14, the seventieth anniversary of the founding of the Jewish state, the United States embassy moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, in fulfillment of another one of Trump's campaign promises, before a jubilant crowd and lavish celebrations of American-Israeli friendship. That day, sixty unarmed Palestinians in a crowd of thousands approaching the demarcation line on the north side of the Gaza Strip were killed by elite Israeli marksmen. These demonstrations had been weekly affairs since March 30 as part of the *nakba* ("catastrophe") day commemorating the Palestinian exodus when they were driven from their land. In a region rife with nonstop massacres, from Syria to Iraq to Yemen, this slaughter passed almost unnoticed—submerged, like the Palestinian cause, in the chaos.

Despite mortar rounds fired from Gaza on May 29, the biggest salvo since the war in the summer of 2014, there were none of the traditional Arab expressions of support. They, too, were drowned out by the sound and fury of the hostility between Sunni and Shiites. By contrast, Israel can boast about getting favors from both Moscow and Washington and playing one against the other. Not only that, but it can also make itself an indispensable actor in ending the Syrian crisis, on the condition of eliminating any residual Iranian presence.

Saudi Arabia is Moscow's most recent significant partner in the Middle East. After decades of antagonism, the two states made a fresh start on their relationship with the visit to Moscow by Saudi King Salman on October 5, 2017. The Custodian of the Two Holy Places with his retinue traveled in sumptuous style, including a plane with a gold escalator for him to descend on. As reflected in the rising price of oil, the cooperation between the planet's two champion crude exporters was mutually beneficial. In May 2018, Brent crude rose above seventy euro (eighty U.S. dollars per barrel), a 45 percent increase in one year, pulled higher by the uncertainties surrounding Iranian hydrocarbon deliveries after the American withdrawal from the JCPOA. This was much higher than what had been predicted for a recovery when oil prices nosedived in 2014. In this context of a structural understanding on the hydrocarbon issue, managing the Syrian matter was of secondary importance to the Russians and Saudis. It was no longer a contentious topic but merely one to consult on.

In February 2018, I visited Riyadh just as the offensive to retake Ghouta got under way. It would finish off the Army of Islam, the Salafist group founded by the late Zahran Alloush, long regarded as the principal Saudi

asset on the rebel side. A highly placed source in the Saudi capital explained to me that the kingdom had finished mourning the rebellion and no longer objected to Bashar al-Assad retaining power, so long as he dropped his Iranian godfather. This seemingly unrealistic scenario had been conveyed to Vladimir Putin. It is conceivable that there were affinities between it, the Israeli military pressures on the Iranian forces in Syria on May 9, and the economic sanctions announced by Donald Trump the day before to pressure Teheran into giving ground.

Tayyip Erdoğan, president of Turkey, Moscow's third ally, unexpectedly reconciled with Russia in August 2016 after a serious six-month split. On November 24, 2015, Turkish air defense shot down a Sukhoi SU-24 from Hmeimim base above the Syrian border. This happened after Russian aircraft had been intensively bombing rebels that Turkey supported. The incident enraged the Kremlin's master. His anger translated first into a virulent media storm, painting the Turkish president as being in league with ISIS and abetting its oil smuggling. Next came painful economic reprisals for Ankara, Russia's number one trading partner in the Middle East, with annual exports amounting to twenty billion dollars. These shrank by 40 percent during the first six months of 2016 while Russian tourists deserted Turkey's beaches for Tunisia's.

With half of Turkish energy needs supplied by Russia, relations between the EU and Ankara on the skids, and serious setbacks for the Muslim Brotherhood in the region, Erdoğan had no choice but to go back to Putin with his tail between his legs. And so he did. After some preliminary moves, followed by an apology for shooting down the Russian fighter, the sweeping reconciliation took place after the failed coup of July 2016 in Turkey, which alone sufficed to turn Ankara's priorities in Syria on their head. The détente with Russia and the simultaneous distancing from the United States (accused by Erdoğan of harboring preacher Fethullah Gülen, the alleged fomenter of the coup) allowed Turkey to move the fight against Kurdish irredentism to the top of their political agenda. Support for the rebels in the southern neighbor became relatively less important.

By pulling the rug out from under the besieged rebels in Aleppo, Turkey made it easier for the loyalist army to retake the city in December 2016. As a guarantor along with Russia and Iran of the Astana accords, Turkey gained control over the rebels who had surrendered and been transported to the Idlib deconfliction zone under Russian protection. Some of them later

served as reserve forces for the Turkish army during the Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch operations, in which they fought the Kurdish forces in Rojava and then occupied the Afrin zone in January 2018.

But the Turkish-Russian relationship remained unstable, hostage to unforeseeable circumstances. On April 9, Erdoğan rebuffed Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's proposal to turn Afrin over to the Damascus authorities. Then, on April 14, Ankara immediately applauded the American-French-British strikes against Syria. In the course of interviews I conducted in the Turkish foreign ministry on May 21, my interlocutors reaffirmed that the territorial integrity of Syria remained Turkish diplomacy's Holy Grail, regardless of who ran the country in the medium term. They singled out autonomy for the northern provinces and the Kurds of Rojava as the government's most pressing national security challenge because it fed into the PKK insurrection.

As he reverted to a very Atatürkian strategy of border defense, Erdoğan strongly pressured his French and especially American NATO allies to push the Popular Protection Units (YPG) back from Manbij, a predominantly Arab city. The deal was sealed on June 5, 2018 after the Turkish minister of foreign affairs visited his American counterpart Mike Pompeo. The United States needed to strengthen its alliance with Ankara within NATO, even if that meant abandoning the Kurds, currently spearheading the battle against ISIS. But Moscow, which kept up its old relationships with the various Kurdish parties, would not completely sacrifice them. The same held true for Teheran.

Still, the opportunity the YPG provided for American and French troops to remain on Syrian territory was frowned on by Putin and Erdoğan alike: it blocked the Iranians from marching toward the Mediterranean, and it kept the loyalist army from deploying east of the Euphrates to retake that oil-rich area. However, even if Ankara, like Jerusalem and Riyadh, reconciled itself to Bashar al-Assad remaining in power for the short term, it still had to satisfy the AKP's Islamist electorate. Its base retained an emotional affinity for the rebels and especially for the Muslim Brotherhood, which had made Turkey its main fallback after its Egyptian debacle in the summer of 2013.

But Turkey also held a special card in the Syrian game: influence over the relocated rebels in the Idlib deconfliction zone. In the spring of 2018, the rebels still constituted an armed force, and the old Al-Nusra Front (rechristened the Organization for Liberating the Shām) still dominated

the other groups militarily. This brigade kept up ideological links with al-Qaeda, despite their institutional bonds having been cut under murky circumstances. It controlled the supplies moving across the border with the Turkish province of Hatay and retained its autonomy vis-à-vis Ankara.

I was told there that members of the Organization for Liberating the Shām were blacklisted and barred from entering Turkey. Be that as it may, while a many-faceted rebel irritant still lurked in the northwest, it was impossible to envision Syria being totally pacified under Damascus leadership. Nor would it be possible to achieve the American-Israeli-Saudi project of removing the Qods Force and its auxiliaries. Finally, the occupation of the Afrin enclave and the adjoining Jarabulus al-Bab zone gave Turkey—which had already annexed Hatay in 1939 in a blow to what was then French Mandate Syria—negotiating leverage for influencing Syria's future. It could also sabotage the autonomy of the Kurdish regions of Rojava and manage the integration of the rebels in a future state. But holding on to Afrin created tensions with Russia and Iran in implementing the Astana process.

Cooperation between Moscow and Teheran on the Syrian matter had been intense and broad-based since 2012. However, relations between the czars and the shahs had always been contentious, ever since Persia had been the object of the Russian push to "warm oceans" in the face of British ambitions to advance north. This contest is depicted in Yury Tynyanov's historical novel published in 1928, *Death of the Vazir-Mukhtar*, the story of the lynching and murder of poet-cum-ambassador Griboiedov by a crowd in Teheran in January 1829. This deep-seated mistrust has persisted between Russia and Iran since then. Soviet support after World War II for the short-lived Kurdish Autonomous Republic of Mahabad in northern Iran helped fan the flame.

After the establishment of the Islamic Republic, and even though the communist Tudeh party had been liquidated in 1983, the mullah regime saw in the USSR and then in its Russian successor a partner for all seasons. This was despite the theocratic displays of the ruling power in Teheran, which included cursing the Soviets for their official atheism. Teheran's claim to be a third-world country recognized in the Soviet Union, and their rhetoric of being an advocate for the international proletariat, a comrade in arms against the global arrogance of the West, the common enemy loathed in the ideologies of both states. After communism's demise, Moscow remained an indispensable ally for Teheran against Washington; still, Russia was a neighbor to be treated with caution—because of their history of conflict.

Seen from the Kremlin, the Moscow-Teheran relationship was at first instrumental on both the political and economic levels. During the war between Iraq and Iran that lasted from 1980 to 1988, General Secretaries Brezhnev, Andropov, Tchernenko, and Gorbachev were all on excellent terms with Saddam Hussein and did not side with Teheran. The war's end and Khomeini's leaving the scene in 1989 cleared the way for a first trip by Iran's president, the pragmatic Hashemi Rafsanjani, to Moscow. Diverse investments by post-Soviet Russia kept Iran afloat, including construction of the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant on the Persian Gulf. But the project was slow-walked to avoid crossing any red lines that would result in too much trouble with Washington. The Russian hydrocarbon giants, like Lukoil, Gazprom, and Rosneft—all with ties to the Kremlin—made sure that Iranian exports did not compete with theirs.

Both Russia and Iran are, in their own way, authoritarian oil states. This makes their economies more supplementary than complementary because they both hold the biggest natural gas reserves, and of Moscow's three previously discussed allies in the region, Iran remains the least credit-worthy. This must be kept in mind when envisioning the juggling act that may eventually be required of Putin if American pressure forces him to choose among them without giving up his hegemony over Syria. Iran only ranks fifth among Russia's trading partners, with 1.7 billion U.S. dollars' worth of exports in 2017, a 21.8 percent drop from the previous year. This puts it far behind Russia's 21.6 billion dollars with Turkey and Israel's 2.5 billion at a time when Moscow's global business with the Middle East has enjoyed spectacular growth (up 86 percent with Saudi Arabia, for example, during the year of King Salman's visit).

That said, it is also true that, ever since the start of the Arab Spring and its fallout for the Levant, Russia and Iran have in effect pooled their military efforts to keep Bashar al-Assad in power. In geopolitical terms, their success is all the more remarkable given how observers around the world in 2012 and 2013 were sure al-Assad's demise was imminent. On the ground, Iran committed Qasem Soleimani's Qods Force to lead infantry auxiliaries from the entire "Shiite crescent"—as Jordan's King Abdullah had nicknamed the Shia countries under Teheran influence. A photo circulating on the internet depicts the smiling general dressed in casual attire at the battle for Palmyra in 2016. Surrounding and embracing him are giant Afghan Hazara fighters, members of the Fatemiyun Brigade

(protectors of the honor of Fatima, the Prophet's daughter and mother of Imam Husayn ibn Ali).

Another video circulating online in the fall of 2017 showed a group of Pakistani Zeynabiyuns (from the name of Imam Husayn's sister Zaynab, another Shiite saint whose tomb is found at Sayyidah Zaynab in the Damascus suburb), some Iraqi militias, and Lebanese Hezbollah fighters. In the video, they sing in heavily accented Persian of their joy at defending Syria against the *takfiris* and terrorism, inspired by Sayyid al-Khorassani (Supreme Leader Khamenei) and led by Qasem Soleimani. After September 30, 2015, Russian special forces officers, pilots, and military advisers formally took over from a Syrian general staff in full disarray. They restored order to the situation for the regime's benefit by taking over the air space so they could fly around-the-clock bombing missions to whittle down the real estate in rebel hands.

However, one month after the fall of Raqqa in the autumn of 2017, at the very moment the fortunes of war seemed to have turned decisively in favor of Damascus, an important incident led to a confrontation between Moscow and Teheran, with the Kurds caught in the middle. As recounted earlier, Russia had acquired through Rosneft the majority interest in the Kurdish Kirkuk-Ceyhan oil pipeline. But pressure by Iran brought to bear by General Soleimani during the funeral for Jalal Talabani on October 17 obliged the Kurds to evacuate Kirkuk. This shut down the pipeline, which was detrimental to Russian interests. The incident brought into sharp relief the problem of diverging Russian and Iranian strategies in Syria. And it did so while Washington, Jerusalem, and Riyadh were intent on dividing these two sometimes allies. From this angle, it is possible to interpret the withdrawal from the JCPOA on May 8 and the Israeli bombing of Iranian targets in Syria the following day as deliberate tactics to isolate and weaken Teheran—and to convince Putin that the price of continuing to collaborate with Iran in Syria would be too high.

This is based on the assumption that Russian and Iranian objectives in Syria differ. The Kremlin has never made a secret of the fact—as Yevgeny Primakov confirmed to me in 2014—that what is at stake for post-Soviet Russia in seeing Syrian institutions survive is making good on its claim to renewed great power status. Hence, what happens to al-Assad's hold on power once the situation has stabilized would be negotiable if it helps ensure a more broad-based and consensual regime. Conversely, the

day-to-day physical expansion of a Shiite and Persian presence in an Arab country that is massively Sunni is only going to cause discontent. It could alienate the Syrian government from the people and require a stepped-up, costly repression. This is where a structural difference exists between a Shiite-majority Iraq, enjoying its social and cultural cousinhood with Iran, and Syria.

In contrast to the Kremlin, for Teheran, keeping Bashar al-Assad in power constitutes a red line. The strategy of relying on the Qods Force and its auxiliaries is an essential security guarantee. It stabilizes the ground corridor to the Mediterranean that cuts across the Mesopotamia region from the Caspian Sea to southern Beirut. It also permits envisioning a prosperous, cooperative sphere in which the Levant's business and agriculture complement Mesopotamia's and the Persian Gulf's hydrocarbon production—while acting as a bulwark against the arrogant West by keeping pressure on Israel. Obviously, this vision is not acceptable to Israel, the United States, or Saudi Arabia. Because Washington, in a variation on the theme of regime change near and dear to the former neocons, saw the JCPOA as furnishing Teheran with the economic means to sustain this policy, Donald Trump tore it up. The assumption the White House is gambling on is that the Kremlin has no desire to become involved in a high-level confrontation and will thus cut its Iranian ally loose.

Vladimir Putin therefore finds himself in a no-win situation in the aftermath of the events of May 8–9, 2018. A break with Iran would entail a major risk, while the Qods Force and Shiite auxiliaries remain indispensable for reinforcing a situation on the ground favoring Damascus. After all, the rebellion still has not been put out of action for good, especially in Syria's northwest. Tens of thousands of frustrated rebels were spoiling for a fight in the Idlib deconfliction zone under what is unpredictable Turkey's control. In giving the impression of yielding to American pressure, seconded by Israel and Saudi Arabia, Moscow would see its newly restored great power status slip away, carefully rebuilt on the back of the Syrian affair. Moreover, President Putin is anxious to preserve the excellent, profitable relations with Israel as much as with Saudi Arabia. The Israeli strike of May 9, 2018 on the Qods Force positions in Syria is highly instructive here: Russia's modulated reaction showed that it would not object to a defense of the Golan. Further, it would not support Teheran across the board in any and all confrontations with Tel Aviv. But, at the same time, elsewhere in Syria Russia

would continue its military cooperation with Iranian troops and the other Shiite auxiliaries, providing ground forces that the Damascus regime still very much needed.

Potentially, the most visible disagreement between Moscow and Teheran in the spring of 2018 will occur in passing from battlefield success (still having to be consolidated) to devising a political process that will result in a stable, post-conflict Syria. It must allow a partial Russian disengagement that reduces the strain on its military budget from sustained, full-throttle Syria operations. On May 14, 2018, when media attention focused on the move of the United States embassy with great pomp from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem on the seventieth anniversary of Israel's founding, Bashar al-Assad was summoned to Sochi by Vladimir Putin.

Al-Assad, who flew over alone aboard a Russian military aircraft, had been dragging his feet on implementing the agreed-upon process. The focus of the Sochi meeting was to create a constitutional committee with the task of forging an agreement with various branches of the opposition leading to a general election. At the end of the May 14 meeting, Putin declared that "all foreign troops must withdraw from Syria." These words lend themselves to complex interpretations, possibly signaling that the Russians think they are exempt on the grounds of having been officially invited in by Damascus. But they also reiterated that the "war has been won," as Putin had proclaimed December 11 at the Hmeimim base, and it was time to move into the more delicate phase of "winning the peace."

On May 19, Alexander Lavrentiev, the Kremlin's special representative for Syria, explained the presidential thinking thus: "This applies to all foreign military units in Syria. They come from the United States, Turkey, Hezbollah, Iran, among others." On May 28, Vitaly Naumkin, director of the Institute of Oriental Studies, a student of the late Yevgeny Primakov, granted me an interview in Moscow. He was deeply involved in contacts between Russia and the warring parties, as well as being a respected academic. He clarified the uncertainties in the situation by contextualizing it against the history of relations between Moscow and Bashar al-Assad. He reminded me that the Russian intervention from the outset was not so much dedicated to supporting al-Assad as avoiding a repeat of the Libya situation.

Indeed, during the presidency of Dmitry Medvedev, Russia had abstained from the vote on UN Security Council Resolution 1973, dated March 17, 2011,

invoking a no-fly zone over Libya for Gaddafi's air force. The resolution also authorized states to take all measures necessary for the protection of threatened populations. The Western coalition, led by Nicolas Sarkozy and David Cameron, took advantage of the Russian abstention to carry out a regime change. Moscow regarded this as a betrayal, and it was chalked up as a liability for Medvedev when Vladimir Putin returned as head of the Kremlin in 2012.

As for Bashar al-Assad, after taking power he had not seemed to relish accepting the invitations to come to Moscow from July 2000 to 2005, despite the need to settle the colossal military aid debt he had run up after taking power. The assassination of Rafic Hariri on February 14, 2005, blamed on the Iran-Syria sphere of influence, cut al-Assad off especially from the France of Jacques Chirac, who had been very attached to the Lebanese prime minister. And so the young Syrian president finally found his way to the Kremlin, where 73 percent of his debt was written off. He would nevertheless be courted subsequently by President Sarkozy, at odds with his predecessor, and invited as guest of honor at the July 14, 2018 Bastille Day parade on the Champs Elysées. I met Al-Assad during his last visit to Paris in October 2010, some months before the Arab Spring.

As Yevgeny Primakov explained to me, when the Arab Spring broke out, Russia's objective in Syria had been keeping one of its allies from being undone. At that stage, Assad's qualities were not in the scale. My Muscovite interlocutor described the 2013–2014 period as a very difficult one for the Damascus regime. The Kremlin shouldered the brunt of it, with Syrian troops demoralized and a president who would have been overthrown had it not been for the intervention of September 30, 2015 pulling him back from the edge. This Russian success had earned its armed forces prestige in the region and swelled the order backlog of its military-industrial complex. It helped the Kremlin recover its international stature, in contrast to the 1990s of Boris Yeltsin, referred to as the "dark decade."

Putin's proactive strategy now was to aim for a peace accord. That presupposed reaching a consensus with parts of the opposition, Islamists included, but not with the UN-designated terrorists, the Al-Nusra Front and ISIS. This in turn required solving the Idlib problem, where 2.5 million were crammed together, including the original inhabitants and the rebels who had been relocated to the deconfliction zone. The Syrian regime, fresh from its success at retaking Ghouta and the Yarmuk camp on the outskirts of

Damascus in late spring 2018, was tempted to resort to the military option at Idlib. It would have been able to count on Iranian support for it, but that would have brought the regime into conflict with Turkey and risked blowing up the Astana process.

Russia, for its part, favored the move toward democratic elections begun in Sochi. Still, in the northeast of the country, Moscow would not abandon its old Kurdish friends—all they had to do was to renounce their American protectors. The United States, in any case were ready to let them go, if one is to put any stock in Donald Trump's declaration on March 30, 2018 that "we're gonna get out of Syria very soon." (That brash statement was dialed back later by high administration officials, only to be implemented for good in October 2019.) Finally, according to Moscow, the oil wells located east of the Euphrates, formerly occupied and exploited by ISIS as part of a profitable smuggling enterprise, had to be returned to the Syrian state as a source of revenue to ensure its viability.

However, in 2018, the oil field was still controlled by American Special Forces on the side of the Kurdish YPG. On February 7, they repelled a raid led by Russian mercenaries, Arab tribesmen, and militiamen close to the Damascus regime. It cost the attackers hundreds of dead from heavy close air support provided by the U.S. Air Force based at al-Udeid in Qatar. The target of the raid had been an oil operation owned by the American company Conoco Oil, a test of Washington's staying power, but only using irregular troops for the probe. It was a new kind of East-West confrontation, foreshadowing the uncertainties to come with partitioning the Levant into zones of influence after the Syrian conflict's end.

It emerged from Vitaly Naumkin's comments to me when I met him in Moscow that Russia holds a good hand of cards, but it must place its bets in a complex game of pressures between conflicting interests of its allies—that is, if it hopes to achieve an uncertain *pax russica* in a moving international context. In the Russian view of things, everyone has to be prepared to trade off their short-term gains against the search for a consensual solution, and any deterioration of the situation will be costly for the Kremlin. In this, the Russians remember the trauma of the previous intervention outside their borders, in 1979 in Afghanistan, and the fatal trap that it turned out to be. But could they negotiate an exit from the Syrian conflict with the West? That is Putin's dilemma, and the American withdrawal from the JCPOA, with the accompanying rise in regional tensions, exposes Russia above all.

On June 14, 2018, Vladimir Putin welcomed Mohammad bin Salman for the kick-off of the World Cup. By a marvelous coincidence, this date corresponded to Eid al-Fitr, the feast that marks the end of the Ramadan fast. This synchronizing of the sacred time of the Muslim calendar with the high mass of the religion that is global, TV-broadcast soccer was highlighted further because this was the inaugural game between the Russian and Saudi teams. Twenty-nine years earlier, in 1989, the Soviet Union collapsed after the fatal blow delivered in Afghanistan by the jihad jointly financed by Saudi Arabia and the United States. The retreat of the Red Army from Kabul on February 15 opened the way to the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9.

Vladimir Putin, at the time a 37-year old KGB officer stationed in the former German Democratic Republic, had had a front-row seat for the debacle. Mohammad bin Salman had only been four years old at the time. Putin watched with satisfaction as the Russian team easily crushed its opponent with five goals to none, thus nearly three decades later symbolically avenging the Soviet defeat of 1989. This outcome reverberated on the green square of Moscow's Luzhniki stadium as if in an echo chamber with the declared rout of a Syrian jihad that Riyadh had "dropped" given the victorious Russian offensive to rescue the Damascus regime.

The tone of the exchanges between the two leaders was extremely cordial, illustrated by the signs of friendship displayed on the official rostrum. They testified to the bad blood the two countries had put behind them and the overturning of the world order that transpired during the pivotal period described in the preceding pages. Vladimir Putin, master of a country that for so long had touted itself as atheist, having offered his wishes to his Saudi guest for the Eid festival, recalled how the historic visit by King Salman in October 2017 had accelerated the mutually beneficial economic and political cooperation between the two oil monarchies and former champions of antagonistic Cold War blocs. Even more effusively, the Saudi crown prince stressed the energy dimension of the collaboration, praising the positive effects of maintaining the price of crude and hoping to inoculate it against an uncertain future.

But the picture was not without its shadows. For one, Qatar, after a year of being embargoed by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and their allies, had shown resilience in standing up to its adversaries thanks to its immense wealth. At the start of the same month, Doha retaliated for its pariah status by announcing its all-cash purchase of Russian S-400 air

defense missiles. A piqued Riyadh mounted a furious diplomatic campaign, threatening its irritating neighbor with a military offensive. This swaggering was called "blackmail" in the high-ranking circles of the Russian government, as relayed by the semi-official Sputnik news site.

As for the next soccer World Cup in 2022, it was just supposed to take place in Qatar, linked with the neighboring states of a Gulf Cooperation Council coming apart at the seams. But the Sunni bloc had fractured to such a degree over the Iranian and Levantine questions that the likelihood of carrying off a sports event on that scale with great pomp appeared increasingly slim. Besides, Qatar had won the right to host the event under controversial conditions that included moving the season to winter for climatic reasons.

Doha's Sunni Muslim Brotherhood enemies made no secret of wanting to throw obstacles in its way. In a kind of preview of what was to come, the sports network beIN SPORTS (as in, "Be in on it") along with Al Jazeera, the other crown jewel of Qatar's television empire, was pirated by a mysterious network derisively named BeoutQ (as in, "Be out of Qatar"). beIN had bought the exclusive broadcast rights for the 2018 World Cup from FIFA and was selling the "package" of matches for the sum of 150 U.S. dollars (half the monthly average salary in Egypt). beIN now accused the ArabSat satellite network, majority owned by Saudi Arabia, of having highly skilled hackers broadcast the purloined images, which the network denied. In Egypt, as reported the *Economist* (June 23, 2018), impoverished television viewers pounced on the free broadcast (in Arabic) by Israeli public television of the Egyptian national team's game against Uruguay on June 15. "I'd watch in Hebrew before I gave money to Qatar," declared a fan to the financial weekly, his way of emphasizing that the fracturing of the Sunni bloc outweighed the old antagonism toward the Jewish state as far as he was concerned.

Egyptian viewers could not stomach the idea that the gas emirate four years down the road would profit from such an event. As Russia had shown in June 2018, hosting the World Cup brought the organizing country a great deal of prestige. With the soft power of the soccer ball, Moscow crowned its return to the ranks of the major powers on the back of its successful Middle East policy—in the face of a deeply divided West. This was amply demonstrated by the disastrous G7 meeting in Canada on June 9 that saw President Trump confront his allies. It turned out to have only been a warm-up to more divisive behavior.

At a NATO meeting in Brussels on July 11–12, the former real estate tycoon raised the threat of a breakup of the Atlantic alliance, once again showing his preference for deals over treaties. On his next stop in the United Kingdom, he repeated his preference for a hard Brexit, in his mind the prelude to destroying a European Union henceforth designated as the enemy. This would supposedly let his country sign separate free-trade agreements very favorable to the United States with the EU's ex-member states. The leader of the free world was intent on embarking on a logic of chaos that would wreak havoc on most pillars of the global order in existence since 1945. Trump's was a disruptive strategy, with the goal of wrecking multilateral institutions. Leaving aside the compulsive tweeting and elevation of Fox News to postmodern gospel truth, it would resurrect fraught isolationist structures from American history.

Meanwhile, on July 15, France won the World Cup with a multiethnic team that included the children of trans-Mediterranean immigrants like the youth of its impoverished urban neighborhoods—*banlieues*. They beat a team of Croatian Catholics, children of the former Yugoslavia that disintegrated during the 1990s, after a war in which they fought their Serbian Orthodox neighbors and Bosnian Muslims. Two years and a day after July 14, 2016, when an attack claimed by ISIS had wreaked havoc on the Promenade des Anglais in Nice, France's symbolic soccer victory helped heal its wounds. It found itself on top of the world sports-wise as Paris finally took it all, its glory bleeding over into the political sphere and in the process upstaging Moscow's symbolic set decoration.

Galvanized by the victory of its soccer team in Moscow's Luzhniki Stadium, emblematic of a France reconciled and remobilized in the face of adversity, Emmanuel Macron looked very much like Europe's leader. Meanwhile, Donald Trump was blindsiding both a German chancellor weakened by the refugee crisis and the rise of the extreme right, and a British prime minister struggling with the disastrous Brexit proceedings. Therefore, instead of playing the role of the solitary hero, Macron would have to give new impetus to a union of European nations being torn apart by a populism haunted by Islamist terrorism and obsessed with "migratory invasions" coming from the southern and eastern Mediterranean.

In his meeting with Vladimir Putin ahead of the July 16 Helsinki summit between the Russian and American presidents, Macron discussed Syria's

future. The Americans bailing out on the southern rebels had resulted in the fall of Daraa, the birthplace of the rebellion on March 18, 2011. Loyalist troops shepherded by Russian military police had taken it back. The insurrection's defeat on Moscow's terms was now a foregone conclusion. And with the American withdrawal from the JCPOA the previous May 8, the Mediterranean region and the Middle East entered a period with high risk of turbulence and unprecedented upheavals.

This was the background for the Helsinki meeting between the White House and the Kremlin. For Vladimir Putin, a former KGB officer still licking his wounds over the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan, the choice of Helsinki as their meeting place, on his insistence, tasted of sweet revenge. It harkened back to the Helsinki Accords, signed on August 1, 1975, that had guaranteed human rights on both sides of the Iron Curtain. This had been a key moment in the Cold War, injecting the acid which would corrode and ultimately sweep away the USSR by legitimizing dissent on its soil.

Forty-three years later, Vladimir Putin, arriving from neighboring St. Petersburg, set about exploiting his interlocutor's vulnerabilities. Donald Trump had just divided the West by alienating all his European partners, and was himself dogged by accusations of Russian interference helping him win the November 2016 presidential elections. The special prosecutor appointed to lead the inquiry, Robert Mueller, had just indicted a dozen of Moscow's intelligence operatives for their involvement in the affair. Trump emerged weakened from the meeting and the joint press conference afterwards, during which he attacked Mueller. The president of the United States had offered Putin, who had perfect command of the issues at hand, a chance to look like his equal.

What's more, he seemed to have granted Putin carte blanche to do as he pleased in his sphere of influence, just as had been the case during the Cold War before 1975, when the world had been divided into two camps: American and Soviet. This amounted to handing the keys to Syria over to Russia for good, the culmination of all the failures of Western policy in the Levant dating back to 2011. The burden was now on Trump to find a fitting way out of Putin's dilemma by constructing a consensual transition out of the chaos. But ultimately there is would be no exit except through negotiations with the Europeans—provided they could agree on a common policy for stability and security in the Mediterranean.

Donald Trump Boxes Himself in

The strange saga of the ISIS Islamist caliphate, proclaimed on June 29, 2014 at the start of Ramadan, came to an end in March 2019 with the fall of Baghouz, its last stronghold. The summer of 2017 had seen the recapture of Mosul, the caliphate's Iraqi metropolis, by an unlikely Western and Shiite coalition, which witnessed agents of the Islamic Republic of Iran coordinating with those of the United States with Russian consent. In October 2017, Raqqa, the ISIS's capital in Syria, fell after being bombed not only by NATO but also by the air forces of certain Sunni oil kingdoms whose largesse had previously supported ISIS.

These successive blows had seemingly sounded the death knell for this unprecedented rogue state bent on applying sharia in full and wreaking indiscriminate terror. Indeed, its ability to coordinate terrorist attacks from the *dawla* ("the state" as its supporters called it) had been dramatically curtailed. Gone were the dark days when ISIS could ravage Europe in a series of appalling attacks—the slaughters at the *Charlie Hebdo* offices and the Hypercacher supermarket in Vincennes in January 2015; the Bataclan, Paris, and Stade de France massacres of November 13; and the mowing down of festive crowds by trucks in Nice on July 14, 2016 and in the Berlin Christmas market that same year. Now it was only loners drawn to ISIS through social networks and personal contacts who carried out isolated attacks. Compared to what had come before, their political impact was minimal.

But even the resounding political and military defeat of the Islamic State with the taking of Raqqa by ground troops of the Kurdish YPG militia did not deter die-hard ISIS followers. Entire families of them sought refuge in the village of Baghouz on the banks of the Euphrates where Syria borders on Iraq. There they dug in, resolved to hold out to the bitter end. It would take another eighteen months of onslaughts before the final surrender.

Most observers neither expected this kind of resistance nor that jihadists by the tens of thousands would manage to squeeze into this small patch of territory. A wider public was also now exposed to the spectacle of wailing women in black face veils surrounded by swarms of dusty children, many of them Europeans, being herded into internment camps. Public opinion was put off by the defiant interviews that some converts or daughters of immigrants gave to the press. There was consequently less inclination than

ever to see the jihadists repatriated to countries they had sworn to destroy, even if they had been painstakingly convicted and imprisoned. Crowding so many of them into the jails of Europe moreover risked turning these into massive recruitment platforms for jihad.

The irrationality of these followers who had no chance of succeeding in a totally hostile environment nevertheless had a rationale, as revealed in *French Jihadism: The Hood, Syria, and Prison*, a book published in early 2020 by French scholar of Islamism Hugo Micheron. Based on in-depth interviews with eighty imprisoned jihadists, he found that the ISIS zealots, convinced they had established Allah's kingdom on earth, were grounded in a postmillenarian logic. In this, they differed from the followers of al-Qaeda, who for the most part belonged to the preceding generation, and had stayed the course in working for a future caliphate.

For the ISIS jihadists, it was inconceivable that their creator had forsaken them: the caliphate's fall was merely a divine test. Their salvation was assured because of their virtuous, strict adherence to Islamic law, demonstrated by segregating women, beheading apostates and infidels, stoning homosexuals, and trafficking in female Yazidi sex slaves. While earthly salvation had not been forthcoming at Baghouz, these militants had such blind faith in their doctrine that they remained convinced of their inevitable final victory. This was as true of the women interviewed in the internment camps as it was of the fugitive Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in a video broadcast on April 29, 2019. They all regarded the loss of territory as nothing more than a momentary setback. They had their eyes on another space, located, so to speak, between the earthly realm, dominated by evil and the *kuffar* (infidels), and the idyllic hereafter with its rivers of wine and dark-eyed *houris* eternally catering to the martyrs: the virtual world.

This would be the principal vector for proselytizing and diffusing the narrative of this "3 G" jihadism. It is in fact with the aid of social media that ISIS's network of terrorism has spread around the world from the bottom up, like the "revolutionary rhizome" of the 1980s leftist philosopher, Gilles Deleuze. By contrast, al-Qaeda and its pyramidal, centralized structure, organized along more Leninist lines, needed television as a medium to spread its message from the top down.

The staggering global impact of the September 11 attacks, which brought a Hollywoodesque flair to the breaking news cycle, established a global jihadist grand narrative. And yet, while 9/11 transformed the new century

of the Christian calendar into an Islamist millennium, it did not yield any territorial conquests. ISIS strategy thereafter shifted to linking the European disenfranchised *banlieues* and their young, radicalized Salafists with the remote cities of the Maghreb and the Middle East. It meant jihadism was everywhere at once around the Mediterranean basin, which became its launching pad for the terrorist wave of the 2010s, with the aid of discount air fares on medium-haul aircraft.

The attacks by Mohammed Merah in Toulouse on March 19, 2012 (the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Algerian war) were the canary in the coal mine for what was to come. The transient fall of repressive regimes—from the Tunisia of Ben Ali to the Syria of al-Assad, Ali Abdullah Saleh's Yemen, Mubarak's Egypt, and Gaddafi's Libya—fostered the proliferation and arming of jihadist movements. They would wait until the first wave of the messy democratic enthusiasm in Tahrir Square in Cairo, or its counterparts in Tunis, Benghazi, or Sanaʿa, had spent itself before springing into action.

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Fast-forward to the summer of 2019: around the Mediterranean, the political systems of the above-mentioned states impacted by the uprisings of 2011–2012 showed obvious signs of exhaustion. At the same time, new conflicts arose in countries that had been relatively spared, most prominently Sudan and Algeria. For his part, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi grasped that these two countries were ripe for tilting into a process of islamization followed by jihadization, just as had happened with the 2011 uprisings. With the Arab Spring countries, this had resulted either in perpetual civil war (as in Syria, Yemen, and west Libya) or a return to authoritarianism. Only Tunisia had broken the mold: its population had resisted the wave of jihadist terrorism, and its democratic institutions had prevailed. Even after President Beji Caïd Essebsi died on July 25, 2019, the Tunisians voted in as his successor on October 13 a retired professor of law, Kais Saied, who promised to refocus public policies on the disenfranchised hinterland, away from the corrupt politicians who were making a mockery of the social dimension of democracy. The electoral process was orderly.

In his video of late April 2019, al-Baghdadi nevertheless gave voice to his hope for jihadism to take hold when he saluted "the fall of the despots in

Algeria and Sudan." He warned that "jihad alone is capable of overthrowing idolatrous tyranny [*taghut*]" and establishing a true Islamic state such as the one briefly embodied by the "caliphate [of ISIS]."

The Sudanese and Algerian situations initially resembled those of Mubarak's Egypt in January 2011. They also had a regime worn down by a long reign marred by bribery and graft concentrated in the hands of a presidential entourage that enjoyed the protection of the intelligence services. The police there saw themselves challenged by protests made up of youths and the otherwise disenfranchised, who had formed an alliance with the impoverished and increasingly marginalized middle class as well as army officers. In Cairo, the military had left open the back streets leading to Tahrir Square whose main approaches the police had blocked, and it kept the police from dispersing the demonstrators. Then it popularized the slogan "The armed forces and the people are the fingers of one hand (*Al-gaysh wal Shaab īd wahed*)." Egypt's Spring ended with Mubarak's fall and a Supreme Council of the Armed Forces taking power. The Council let the Muslim Brotherhood win the elections to better expose and then radically suppress the organization before taking over completely in the summer of 2013.

In Algiers, the army general staff also pushed out President Abdelaziz Bouteflika in March–April 2019 following protests against the "national shame" of an incompetent, senile leader keeping his grip on power. The high command proceeded to marginalize the ex-president's clan as well as the intelligence services. Some of its leading members were imprisoned to appease the continuing demonstrations. Protests regularly revved up in the streets when the mosques emptied after Friday prayers, as had been the case during the Arab Spring of 2011. In the summer and into the fall of 2019, these ongoing demonstrations were aimed primarily at preventing the July, then rescheduled to December presidential elections from taking place under military auspices. The demonstrators were initially welcomed by the general staff led by General Ahmed Gaid Salah, happy to regain legitimacy on the cheap by sacrificing the Bouteflika "fuse."

The movement, meanwhile, continued to be coordinated by informal groups that had emerged from civil society. Despite provocations, it had avoided repression by not resorting to violence. However, no organized party emerged that was capable of orchestrating the process of gaining power and changing the regime. In contrast to the Tunisian uprising of 2010–2011, Algeria's lacked a secularized middle class backed by

organizations capable of building democratic institutions. This is what the Quartet had accomplished in Tunis in 2013–2014, after the curtain fell on the Laarayedh government. In effect, Algerian society was stifled by the redistribution of oil income and submerged under a demographic tsunami of the disenfranchised that the government had promoted as part of an obsessive competition with its Moroccan neighbor.

The situation worsened thanks to the downward trend in oil prices, catalyzed by the United States's emergence as the world's largest shale oil producer. This development shook the model of the rentier state to its foundations everywhere (from Algeria to Venezuela, from Sudan to the oil states on both sides of the Persian Gulf). In contrast to the Arab upheavals of 2011, the Algerian movement by the fall of 2019 still had not seen an organized Islamist force raise its head. When Abbassi Madani, the former head of Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front, was laid to rest in Algiers on April 27 after his death in exile in Qatar, only a handful of his followers attended the funeral. Algerians in their forties and older, after all, are still traumatized by the two hundred thousand victims of the civil war of the 1990s. Contrast this with the popular outpouring in Algeria on the death of the former Muslim Brotherhood president of Egypt, Mohamed Morsi, during a court appearance in Cairo on June 17. The following Friday it translated into hostile slogans directed at Marshal el-Sisi that compared him to General Gaid Salah. The protesters flashing the Muslim Brotherhood hand sign far outnumbered the mourners at Madani's funeral.

In Sudan, it was also the general staff that removed President Bashir and the *mukhabarat* (secret services) on April 11, in a maneuver aimed at preempting and controlling popular discontent. Here also, observers noted the convergence of interests between the youth population, the dispossessed, and the educated middle classes sinking into poverty. But an attempted occupation of downtown Khartoum by the demonstrators, modeled on Cairo's Tahrir Square uprising in January 2011, ended badly. It served as pretext for the military to intervene violently with the blessing of neighboring Egypt and its supporters on the Arabian Peninsula. The uprising was put down on June 3 at a cost of 128 dead, but a million people took to the streets in protest on June 30, the thirtieth anniversary of General Bashir's 1989 coup.

These situations foment intense power struggles that evolve from mobilization in the streets to destabilization of the security situations.

They turn into a wait for either a hypothetical virtuous democratization or a return to a newly configured authoritarian rule. For the emergent Salafist movements and the Islamist militants, this state of affairs furnishes prime growth opportunities. The regimes of both countries flirted with Salafism, seeing in sharia a means for maintaining order among the massively expanding dispossessed youth. Overburdened health, education, and urban infrastructures could not cope with this unchecked population explosion, for which the informal economy was the principal, if unreliable, provider of jobs. The Salafist ideology preaches a cultural break from ungodly lifestyles and imposes an Islamist moral order, and yet refrains from calling for action against the strong powers in place that had coopted it. This so-called "civil concord" was the main thread in Bouteflika's political strategy after the 1992–1997 civil war. As for General Bashir, he had come to power with help from the local Muslim Brotherhood and its branch led by the charismatic Hassan al-Turabi. Bashir later distanced himself from the Brotherhood, but their networks did not disappear from the scene. In both cases, the weakening of the ruling powers let the—momentarily—quiescent Islamists drop their allegiance and become active.

Nevertheless, this favorable general context for jihadist comebacks needs relativizing by several global and regional, as well as local, factors. First of all, the ISIS operational mode, despite the millenarism of its leaders and followers, has failed politically and militarily. Its ideology hangs on in peer circles on social media, but its capacity to draw in much larger populations has evaporated with the wiping out of the *dawla*, even if at the hands of the *kuffar* and other apostates. ISIS now lacks the prestige that came from having built a territorial caliphate that seemingly incarnated the Muslim prophecies and messianic hopes. The jihadists need to reestablish their street cred, always cognizant of the possibility that a new, post-ISIS phase may ensue in the same way as when their network superseded al-Qaeda's. This process necessarily will take some time. There is no trace of it in the summer of 2019 on jihadist social networks, where their gloating over the bloody years 2015–2017 has given way to much soul searching. And the killing of the so-called caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi by U.S. Special Forces on October 27, 2019, in a hideout within the Idlib "deconfliction zone," has put an end to what was left of the online charisma of the erstwhile world leader of jihad, sealing the end of the ISIS model—even though the U.S. military operation had to be put into a wider regional context, as we shall see below.

Another factor, a regional one, relates to the deep fissures in the Sunni sphere. The Sunni Islamist movement uniting the Muslim Brotherhood, the Salafists, and the jihadists against the "Shiite heresy" and Teheran had crushed the March 2011 majority Shia-inspired revolt in Bahrain, to the applause of the entire mix of Sunni movements is history. The overthrow in July 2013 of the Muslim Brother President Morsi, urged and financed by the Saudis and Emiratis, was the final outrage that split this world. The first fallout from the old order's demise came when the Syrian Islamist rebellion was cut off by most of its financial sponsors on the Arabian Peninsula, causing the uprising to fall apart. This was as much a factor in its failure as the pounding it took in September from the Russians flying from their air base at Hmeimim in support of Alawite ground forces. Also a factor is the rift between the Muslim Brotherhood and its Turkish and Qatari state sponsors on the one hand, and their Saudi and Emirati enemies on the other, which breaks up the internal continuities of Sunni Islamism.

Moreover, this is all happening at a time when the petromonarchies are facing the stark reality of an increasingly shaky rentier model. While oil price swings might still let them reap temporary gains, these states can no longer count on covering their budgetary needs, especially the most populous among them. Above all, the massive extraction of shale oil and gas in the United States of late has seen Texas dethrone Saudi Arabia as the world swing producer. The latter can only support prices at the cost of its alliance with the Russian petro-oligarchy, which also figured in Riyadh's cutting-off the last of the Syrian Islamist rebels in 2017–2018. Reengineering Saudi Arabia's post-rentier economy, a pet project of Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, has to his distancing the regime from the Wahhabi ulemas as its main legitimators, as well as to coming out in support of women taking part in the labor market (by letting them get behind the wheel, for example).

These reforms on Saudi Arabia's part make the out-of-control financing of jihadi and Salafi die-hard networks by official bodies much more complex than had been the case at the start of the decade. The same holds true even for the quasi-public channels or private fortunes of the Salafist-jihadist movement. This does not mean that this particular ideology is cowed—the Saudi crown prince is routinely demonized on jihadist social networks. However, the "spirit of jihad" is no longer quite as responsive as it was during the first half of the 2010 decade. This likely affects the ability to organize

a resilient mobilization. Also to be noted here is that the Western states have caught up with the 3G-era jihadists' creative use of computers and social media. Moreover, 5G-era virtual surveillance techniques are gradually enveloping the planet. This will curtail the movement and organization of the jihadists, who before could materialize practically at will anywhere in the Mediterranean basin.

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The tensions in the Persian Gulf in the summer of 2019 testified to the persistence of an irritant among the petromonarchies on one side, and between Iran and the Saudi-Emirati bloc supported by the United States on the other. On October 2, 2018, Jamal Khashoggi, a dissident Saudi journalist and an erstwhile familiar of the royal family, was murdered in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, sparking a wave of international protests. These culminated in June 2019 in a UN report incriminating Saudi Arabian authorities, who had earlier tried to lay the murder at the feet of the assassination squad.

The victim, who had been close to the Muslim Brotherhood and Osama bin Laden in his youth, had later been part of the liberal establishment, which included some of the kingdom's most prominent princes. He was in tune with the liberalization of morals decreed by Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, but had also sharply criticized his absolute hold on power. This was especially the case after the Ritz Carlton revolution, which we analyzed earlier in this work. Most damning of all, after he became an exile in Washington, where he published some opinion pieces in the *Washington Post* that were high critical of Riyadh, Khashoggi moved closer to the positions taken by Qatar. Despite the revulsion over the murder, the tension between Saudi Arabia, sure of its financial power, and its Western allies abated after several months.

Meanwhile, Donald Trump never wavered in his support of the crown prince. This stance was all the more necessary, given that American policy in the region of maximum pressure on Iran designed to effect regime change had to be closely coordinated with Riyadh. This policy was the brainchild of two "hawks" in Trump's cabinet, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and National Security Adviser John Bolton, both former neoconservatives. Slowly asphyxiating under the severe economic sanctions

imposed following the American withdrawal from the JCPOA in May 2018, Teheran reacted as it had during the 1980s when it was attacked by Saddam Hussein (a war in which Iraq had the support of the West and the Sunni petromonarchies): it began conducting low-intensity asymmetrical warfare, essentially via unidentified proxies, thus holding its own against a feckless United States.

Starting out with some threats from unspecified sources aimed at American oil company personnel in Iraq in the spring of 2019, the situation escalated when a barrage of missiles launched from the Gaza Strip rained on Israel on May 3. They were launched by Islamic Jihad, the Palestinian Islamist group closest to Teheran. Several penetrated Israel's "Iron Dome" missile defense system and caused a few Israeli deaths. This prompted Washington to move the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln into the Persian Gulf just as new missiles hit a Saudi oil pipeline. This time they had been launched from Yemeni territory controlled by the Houthis, another Teheran ally.

In mid-June, a Norwegian and a Japanese oil tanker en route from Saudi and Emirati ports were mysteriously attacked in the Strait of Hormuz. Combined with the downing of an American drone by Iranian fire at nearly the same time, this increased tensions to the point of the Americans nearly launching a retaliatory strike on June 20. According to Donald Trump, only the prospect of the loss of human life motivated his decision to call it off. "Our weapons were loaded and we were ready to retaliate . . . when I asked how many would die: 'One hundred fifty people, sir,' a general told me." Whereas the United States and their allies in the Peninsula blamed the tanker attacks on Iran, some observers suspected they were provocations engineered by the other side to ratchet up the tension with the Islamic Republic.

Finding out what really happened will have to wait for another day, but these incidents in the Gulf in late spring 2019 threw into sharp relief the limitations of American unilateralism. All of this was happening while President Trump, in the second half of his term, was gearing up for reelection. The former real estate developer's chances of winning would suffer were the United States to be drawn into an unintended conflict in the region, since he had made a promise to avoid costly, futile interventions abroad like those in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria a major pillar in his 2016 electoral platform.

In effect, the trashing of treaties and alliances by the 2019 occupant of the White House, accompanied by a wide range of sanctions impacting European but also Asian economic interests, meant that the United States lacked international support and was going it alone in its dispute with Iran. And Teheran, despite a relative dust-up with Moscow over Syria's future—the Revolutionary Guards want to turn it into a base for firing missiles into Israel while the Russians are eager for a local political compromise between the Alawite regime and the Sunni majority—could nevertheless count on the Kremlin's support (it was Russian-supplied missiles, after all, that shot down the American drone).

This dynamic further weakened President Trump. His situation was all the more complex because the United States no longer depends on oil that passes through the Strait of Hormuz, owing to its own massive production of shale oil and gas in states ranging from Texas to Alaska. U.S. vital interests are no longer in play in the Gulf—unlike in the 1980s when Iranian attacks on Kuwaiti tankers prompted their reflagging as American vessels and escorts by U.S. navy warships. Donald Trump therefore found himself boxed in between his interventionists, Pompeo and Bolton, and his economic and reelection advisers preaching nonintervention.

On September 10, 2019, the president suddenly fired his national security adviser, making it clear that he had renounced the neoconservative twist in his foreign policy that the latter advocated, and that he feared an uncontrolled escalation of violence in the Middle East would jeopardize his reelection campaign. After all, he owed his 2016 victory—though Hillary Clinton led by three million ballots and had won the popular vote—to his edge in the electoral college in a few swing states where the number of American soldiers who had died in the Iraq war was far above average, and where he had campaigned aggressively to "bring the boys back home."

Bolton's sacking was not lost on Teheran for long: four days later, the Saudi Aramco oil site in Abqaiq, which represents 5 percent of the world oil production, 50 miles southwest of Dahran, was hit by an array of missiles and drones, cutting the Kingdom's production in half. The attack was originally claimed by Iranian-backed Houthi rebels from Yemen, who intended to show they could reach vital Saudi interests and hence were in a capacity to pressure for a deal in order to end the Saudi-led war in Yemen on their terms. But intelligence quickly deflated the Houthi pretense and established that the strike had been launched from the northern shores of

the Persian Gulf—either from Iranian territory or from some part of Iraq that was under the control of Teheran-backed Shiite militias. Even though it was on everybody's mind that the attack had been decided on behalf of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (*Pasdaran*), who exposed with this move President Trump's political incapacity to retaliate, there was no public incrimination of the Islamic Republic in the White House—making it clear that the president would not risk his reelection prospects on a hazardous confict with Iran. Also, after a momentary surge in oil prices in the aftermath of September 14, the cost of crude went back quickly to its downward spiral, underlining yet again that the Kingdom had ceased to be the world oil market swing producer, since shale oil drilling had made America the prime player in that game. Also, the unusually mild reaction on the part of the forty-fifth U.S. President, usually more vehement against his adversaries whom he randomly cursed or abused, showed that Saudi Arabia was no longer at the top of Trump's agenda, as it had been when he made his first foreign visit, in March 2017, to Riyad. He would not go out of his way to rush to the defense of the Kingdom, thereby serving notice to Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman that no foreign policy intricacies should mess with the reelection objective in the fall of 2020.

But such foreign problems came back with a vengeance as a main campaign theme the following week: on September 24, Speaker Nancy Pelosi initiated an impeachment inquiry against Donald Trump after it was alleged that he and some of his advisers had pressured the Ukrainian government to take action against Senator Joe Biden's son—who had had business interests in that country—abusing the power of the presidency to advance his personal interests. The meddling of foreign policy issues in an American presidential race was a rarity indeed: it would then spread uncontrolled, and become a major hindrance for the White House incumbent.

Less than two weeks later, U.S. media and public opinion attention was deflected onto another overseas issue with strong domestic repercussions: the Trump administration ordered American troops to withdraw from northeastern Syria, which had been under Kurdish YPG control since those forces had played a decisive role in fighting ISIS on the ground, leading to the fall of Raqqa, the erstwhile "capital of the Caliphate," in October 2017, at the cost of more than 10,000 casualties in their ranks. The Kurds paid a heavy toll of life for the sake of defeating the major terrorist organization sowing death in Western countries, in Europe in particular.

Turkish President Erdoğan held a different view of the YPG, though—as we saw above—he insisted that the group was but an extension of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party), the outlawed irredentist Kurdish party in Turkey, waging armed struggle against Ankara (which labeled it a terrorist organization, as the EU and United States also did). The Turkish strongman had stated repeatedly that his army would cross into Syria soonest to "nip in the bud" the YPG security threat on his country. Hence U.S. soldiers, together with a smaller contingent of French and British special Forces and intelligence were assisting the Kurds in tracking and disbanding ISIS groups, interrogating prisoners, and managing the detention camps for jihadists and their families. They were also providing decisive protection to those same Kurds against an attack by Turkey. Erdoğan's troops were massed on the border, and he claimed a twenty-mile deep Kurdish-free security zone on the Syrian side of the frontier. The U.S. military also guarded oilfields in northeastern Syria that were exploited by companies such as Conoco, after they had been seized back from ISIS in late 2017—as an earlier bloody incident with Damascus proxies attempting to seize one field in 2018 had shown. The return of such facilities to Syrian government control was a key political issue for Vladimir Putin, as it could bring revenues to Damascus and henceforth alleviate the burden of Russian aid to its protégé Bashar al-Assad.

The U.S. army's decision to pull out on October 6 was followed three days later by a Turkish onslaught, preceded by airstrikes on border towns and raids perpetrated by "Syrian National Army" irregulars, all of whom were former Syrian rebels including many jihadists, and a number of its factions had been recipients of CIA-provided material "to fight ISIS." The uproar in the West against what was described as American betrayal of Kurds who were abandoned after having played such a key role against ISIS terrorism was so intense that President Trump published on October 9 a surprising letter to Erdoğan that was closer to the former real estate developer's *Art of the Deal* rhetoric than to diplomatic parlance:

> Let's work out a good deal. You don't want to be responsible for slaughtering thousands of people, and I don't want to be responsible for destroying the Turkish economy—and I will! . . . History will look upon you favorably if you get this done the right and humane way. It will look upon you forever as the devil if good things don't happen. Don't be a tough guy. Don't be a fool!

Though it was reported that the Turkish strongman was so infuriated as to throw the letter into the trash, his military operation went on unabated. More than 100,000 people fled the area, as SNA irregulars announced that they occupied more villages by the day. On October 11, SNA Islamist Ahrar al-Sharqia fighters captured and executed Hevrin Khalaf, a secular young female politician leading a left-wing party, and three other manacled Kurdish prisoners, to the shouts of "Allahu Akbar"—the widely spread execution video being reminiscent of ISIS atrocities from the "Islamic caliphate" peak years. On October 13, heavy shelling of former ISIS detention facilities in the city of Tell Abyad allowed 745 prisoners to escape—a fact that an embarrassed White House denied, but which was later confirmed by senior U.S. officials.

That same day, it became clear that Donald Trump's amateurish Middle East policy was confronted by a far more sophisticated player, one who had already make him look like a fool at the Helsinki summer summit in 2018: Vladimir Putin. The Russian leader quickly profited from the erratic behavior of the president. He brokered a deal under his auspices between the besieged Kurds of Syria and Damascus, so that Bashar al-Assad's military could move north into territory under SDF-YPG control to which he had been denied access by the presence of U.S. troops that were now fleeing on Trump's order and bombing their former bases to reduce their military usefulness. The Kremlin master was quietly achieving his long-held goal—having his protégé reconquer as much of possible of Syrian land—without a shot being fired. Putin also made it clear to Erdoğan that Moscow, not Washington, was setting the limitations to the Turkish military offensive. If Trump had betrayed the Kurds in selfish panic, the Russian leader remained true (to some extent at least) to a people many leaders of whom had been trained by the KGB (Putin's own alma mater) in the former Soviet Union. And maintaining some Kurdish semi-autonomous military presence in northeastern Syria, through a deal brokered with Assad envoys at Hmeimim airbase under Russian auspices, was also a means to keep Ankara on short leash. Putin did enjoy to tango with Erdoğan inasmuch as the latter had a Kurdish stone in his shoe.

Another test of who was setting the standards in the Middle East occurred when Trump dispatched Mike Pence to Ankara on October 17, to soothe the Turkish leader's fury over the infamous October 9 letter, and also as U.S. public opinion grew increasingly wary of the White House's muddle-headed

fiasco. The vice-president, not a foreign policy virtuoso, and someone who had had a fallout with Erdoğan in 2018 about the imprisonment in Izmir of a fundamentalist pastor who belonged to his own sect, tried to appease domestic concerns with the attempted brokering of a cease-fire between Turkey and the SDF-YPG forces. Though Turkish military forces more or less respected the letter of the agreement, their Syrian proxies ignored it—a sheer mockery of U.S. clout. Adding insult to injury, Putin received Erdoğan in Sochi on October 22, in a demonstration of how to make a deal—for real. The Black Sea resort "10-point memorandum" that came out of the meeting stipulated that the border between Syria and Turkey would be patrolled by joint Russian-Turkish forces east and west of the newly Turkish-controlled Syrian area south of the border between between Tal Abyad and Ras al Ayn (see map, "Syria: at the Crossroad of World Politics - Fall 2019"), while Russian-Syrian [Assad's] army patrolled the rest of the frontier. Gone was America—and the West—from northeastern Syria.

While U.S. troops were relocated around the Deir Ez Zor Conoco–drilled oil fields—a move labeled as "banditry" by the Russian Defence Ministry spokesman—Bashar al-Assad used revamped nationalist rhetoric to mobilize support at home for "any group that takes up popular resistance against Erdoğan and Turkey. . . . If we don't do this, we don't deserve the homeland."

Such a declaration could not have been made without the Kremlin's backing: Erdoğan was being strictly contained by Putin, now that Moscow's primary goals (U.S. military pullout from the border area and replacement of American patrols by Russian patrols, with Assad's army now spread over most of former YPG controlled territory) had been achieved.

In the midst of such a catastrophe for the international standing of the United States, Donald Trump, under bipartisan fire for his erratic troop withdrawal from Syria, and facing impeachment proceedings in the Ukraine affair, resorted to a military operation that he hoped would bring him much-needed positive publicity and kudos for leadership: the killing of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, self-styled caliph of the ephemeral "Islamic State." Baghdadi did not wield much influence any more, after the final defeat of the last ISIS combatants at Baghouz in March, and a couple of statements routinely praising jihad since that date showed that he could still bark but hardly bite. Nevertheless, he was a household name for his litany of jihadi atrocities, and his elimination would provide a political bonus for whoever performed it. But the timing and the conditions of the

raid raised a number of questions, and brought only a brief respite from the President's trials.

In the night of October 26, eight U.S. helicopters departed a military base at Erbil in the Kurdish Regional Government autonomous region of Iraq. They reached the village of Barisha, located in the Idlib deconfliction zone, three miles from the Turkish border, an area controlled by the Russian and Turkish air forces, where the dominant force on the ground was *Hay'at hurras ad-din* (Guardians of Islam Organization), a splinter group from Al Qaeda with close ties to Turkish intelligence. One of their local commanders, host to Baghdadi, was opportunely shot during the raid. The ISIS caliph's isolated compound was attacked and he died detonating his explosive vest. Donald Trump described in vivid detail his final moments at a press conference, stating that he was "running into a dead-end tunnel, whimpering and crying and screaming all the way. . . . He died like a dog, he died like a coward. The world is now a much safer place."

To a large extent, the operation to kill Baghdadi was meant to echo Bin Laden's elimination at his Pakistani compound on May 2, 2011. Actually both men were terminated by U.S. military forces after they had become a spent force—they had been dead politically already. But the al-Qaeda founder was of a much higher caliber and still commanded respect over a wider array of jihadi sympathizers than the erstwhile ISIS leader. Also, Barack Obama's sober depiction of the Abbotabad event contrasted sharply with his successor's basking in the indulgent description of Baghdadi's demise. Furthermore, the Obama administration acted largely on their own to finish off Bin Laden, after they had tracked his courier. The same does not hold for the Barisha raid: though it was mentioned that intelligence had been gathered thanks to an informant who had defected to Syrian Kurds, and that unspecified Iraqi (Kurdish?) intelligence provided major help, it is quasi-impossible to believe that Baghdadi could have lived three miles from the Turkish border in an area controlled by Islamist organizations porous to Turkish secret services without Ankara's knowledge. To what extent was this timely killing a quid pro quo after Donald Trump had pulled out his troops from northeastern Syria, paving the way for the Turkish military border crossing, and providing an avenue for Russian deployment? At the time of this writing (November 2019), many hypotheses and doubts have arisen in the United States, and official investigations should provide more information—after House speaker Nancy Pelosi criticized Donald Trump

for "informing Russia of the military operation before telling congressional leadership."

* * *

For the second time in modern American history since the Iran hostage crisis fiasco helped Ronald Reagan trounce Jimmy Carter in 1980, the intricacies of Middle Eastern crises may well play a significant role, forty years later, in the U.S. Presidential election. Four decades of chaos the West—and the Middle East—should definitely walk away from.

Conclusion

Middle Eastern Fault Lines and Global Tectonics

FOR THE PAST FORTY YEARS, the Mediterranean and the Middle East have undergone immense upheavals. Throughout the twenty-first century, this region has been a central element in the convulsions accompanying the birth of a new world order. Unceasing, inflamed belligerence intersects with major international tensions and conflicts whose sequence and articulation the preceding pages have attempted to retrace.

In the aftermath of the October War of 1973, the emphasis shifted from the Israeli-Arab confrontation, which had been its organizing structure, to a dynamic of exploding oil prices feeding the parallel rise of political Islamism. It fragmented during the pivotal year 1979, when jihad in Afghanistan countered the Iranian Revolution. The antagonism toward the Jewish state from then on became subordinated to the collision between Shiite crescent and Sunni bloc. After closing out the twentieth century by delivering the death blow to the USSR in 1989, jihadism spilled outside the traditional Muslim space in spectacular fashion when al-Qaeda attacked the United States on 9/11. It was the opening trauma of the third millennium.

However, bin Laden's strategies, as well as those pursued against him by Washington's War on Terror, failed in 2005 when they were absorbed into the sectarian massacres of an occupied Iraq. But their legacy in the following decade would be the spread of ISIS from Mesopotamia to Europe's marginalized banlieues. After a brief phase of democratic euphoria, the Arab Spring uprisings that suddenly cropped up in 2011 became its hostages. With the

exception of Tunisia (even though the precarious economy jeopardized the freedoms achieved), the other countries involved teetered between authoritarianism or devastating civil wars. Their low point was the establishment of Islamic State's caliphate in the Levant between 2014 and 2017.

This drama also affected the West, with millions of refugees and illegal immigrants crossing the Mediterranean or coming through Turkey. This set off a populist reaction by the extreme right, haunted by fear of a spreading Islam. It weakened Germany, Italy, Hungary, Austria, Spain, France, Belgium, among others and revived in parts of the native population the temptation of a return to totalitarianism, questioning the very spirit and continued existence of the European Union, already endangered by Brexit. This spirit of togetherness was simultaneously damaged by the American president, Donald Trump. Trump smashed multilateralism by withdrawing from treaties, among them the JCPOA constraining Iranian nuclear weapons production, but also others dealing with global warming and international trade. Pulling out U.S. troops from Syria in October 2019 was a final attempt at disentangling America from the Middle East. Meanwhile, Vladimir Putin basked in his Syrian successes, leveraging them to reassert Russian power, and China cast its web of power and influence across the Middle East with its "One Belt, One Way" new Silk Roads.

From what seems a hopelessly chaotic situation, there nevertheless emerge several structural factors for the world of tomorrow. This half-century, ruled by the sign of the Koran and the barrel, as we noted, was marked throughout by hydrocarbon inflation and an expanding political Islam. But this correlation no longer appears tenable for the medium term. Oil supplies keep increasing significantly, largely because of increasing exploitation of shale gas and oil, especially in the United States. At the same time, the accelerating shift to electric vehicles will continue to reduce demand. Crude oil prices dropped 70 percent between 2014 and 2016, sparking the Ritz Carlton Revolution in Saudi Arabia, the key Arab petromonarchy.

It resulted in Mohammad bin Salman, crown prince and Saudia Arabia's strongman, taking drastic measures for reducing the kingdom's dependence on rents. He pushed through a transformation in the nation's moral code that sapped the authority of the Wahhabite ulemas, their entanglement with the ruling power, and sponsorship of Salafist expansion across the globe. This trend will not inevitably follow a straight line: the economic climate, the Saudi-Russia agreement on stabilizing oil production

and boosting prices, and uncertainties revolving around Iranian exports all combined to give a short-term financial breather to Riyadh and Moscow. But the structural changes are inescapable. Straws in the wind are the announced intentions of speeding up the transition to the digital economy in the Gulf, evidence of what is on the mind of the leaders in these countries.

However, such moves do presuppose a distancing from the Salafist ideology, which, as it happens, is perfectly adapted for the virtual world. We need look no further than the online preaching of jihad, as in the future social media will be some of the chief vectors for proselytizing and spreading its ideology around the world. Still, that only involves the use of the computing tool, the consumption of data, or their manipulation. It is the high-tech startups that instead will be the producers of the new wealth of nations. However, the perpetuation of authoritarian regimes that stifle individual initiative by curtailing civil liberties do not augur well for entrepreneurial creativity by any means. But the failure of the democratization process carried by the 2011 Arab Spring and perverted by Islamism raises the issue of cultural reform with respect to dogma as a precondition for transforming the relationship between state and society.

Still, the confusion between what Koranic Arabic calls *dīn* (religion, or the beyond) and *dunya* (the world, here below) sets up an order that cannot escape submission to the sacred. It substitutes a divine sovereignty embodied in the Scriptures to sovereignty of the *dēmos*—the people constituted as nation. Rents—presented by their beneficiaries as a divine reward dispensed by the Almighty to his most hardline followers—destroy civil society because they stymie formation of wealth through work and entrepreneurism. They create a vicious cycle, allowing a monopoly on power by oligarchies defended by Praetorian Guards and legitimized by turbaned clerics, while the ruling powers spread some of the bounty around to buy social peace. What is more, rents shrink the horizon for change within the sacred register: the ruler is denounced as impious, perverse, and alienated from a transcendent Justice of which the dissident preachers claim to be the authentic exegetes. Such was the process ending in the establishment of the Islamic State.

It is worth noting that the main source of revenues for that so-called State—or *dawla* as its followers called it—was oil, smuggled in tank trucks across contiguous borders. It earned ISIS millions of petrodollars, making

it the richest terrorist entity in the world. Rents, albeit in a criminal form, thus supported the Islamic State and its imposition of sharia, as shown ad nauseam by the innumerable videos of physical abuses, tortures, and beheadings inflicted on the bodies of resisters. These revenues were the monstrous culmination of the rentier state whose final eradication, leaving aside the terrible devastations, bequeathed as its epitaph the words "Fuck ISIS" scrawled on what remained of the minaret sticking out of the rubble of Mosul's al-Nuri Mosque. It was from here that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi had proclaimed the caliphate in July 2014, sanctifying the political order's submission to a religious rule of which he was the guarantor.

The erasure of its territory completed the moral collapse of ISIS. This is true despite the fact that clusters of fanatics from the prisons of the French banlieues, from the expanse of the Syrian desert, and from the Mosul refugee camps perpetuate its deadly ideal. But the Islamic State's defeat—interpreted as a divine test on jihadist discussion boards on social media—left its members at a loss for how to continue the fight.

For their part, the Muslim Brotherhood had suffered a historic setback with the ousting of President Mohamed Morsi in Cairo in July 2013. Their branches had previously had staying power, from Europe to Turkey to Qatar. But their ability to incarnate a pious, bourgeois alternative to the revolutionary disorder of the Arab Spring, making it a favorite of the Obama presidency as well as Al Jazeera, had by then gone out of fashion. In Turkey, even if the Islamic reference is still present in the ruling party AKP, the priority assigned to nationalism by President Erdoğan faced with Kurdish irredentism and Syria's breakup relativizes support for the Brothers.

As for Qatar, in the fall of 2019 it could have celebrated having withstood a long embargo and blockade imposed by its Saudi and Emirate neighbors. Safeguarding its territory and interests, including the quest for hosting the 2022 World Cup, became the axis of its foreign policy and opulent soft power. Qatar now had priorities aside from the across-the-board support it had rendered to the Brotherhood in 2012. For Qatar's Saudi rivals, homegrown Salafism went through an unexpected crisis in its relationship with the monarchy. The longer it continued and deepened, the more it deprived the Salafists of the unbelievable financial godsend that they had lived off for the past half-century. In the Shiite camp, credit for the successes achieved on the ground in Iraq and especially Syria accrued mainly to the Qods Force, commanded by General Qasem Soleimani. Although he incarnated the

ethos of the Islamic Republic, today he also represents a nationalist military figure. Some see in him an alternative to a theocracy violently strained by the resumption of economic sanctions after the American withdrawal from the JCPOA.

Political Islam in its various guises thus underwent one of the great tests of its recent history. That observation in no way prejudges its capacity to rebound, as previously demonstrated. For instance, as noted in the first part of this book, after its defeat in Algeria and Egypt in 1997, jihadism mutated by projecting itself globally under the al-Qaeda brand. That organization's failure then paved the way ultimately for the emergence of ISIS. This quasi-Hegelian dialectical movement went through three successive stages of affirmation, negation, and surpassing over the span of four decades. Has it exhausted its model of political mobilization with the perspective of the structural decline of oil rents? Or would it succeed in finding a new form of expression for galvanizing even the impoverished masses in countries with devastated economies and societies—like Syria, Iraq, Yemen, or Libya, to name the most tragic cases of the 2010 decade?

The responsibility of the jihadist firebrands and other Islamists is bound to these atrocities, and it is possible to conceive of their being called to account for them. But as became clear to me from a debate in April 2018 on the University of Mosul campus—where faculty buildings destroyed by the Western coalition bombing adjoined those ISIS had blown up—the blame for the chaos is spread around. In a city where part of the population made its accommodations with the caliphate of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, some of the speakers espoused the need for a deep-rooted cultural revolution. It would separate the sacred corpus, captured by its literalist exegetes, from both civil society's organization and its relations with the state. But there were others who, no less stridently, cast suspicion on the West as a whole, accusing it of having created ISIS for the sole purpose of jointly destroying the countries which the West had in its grip. This conspiracy theory is very fashionable in the Arab world and is nourished daily on social media. It dates back to 9/11, when pride in having Muslims strike arrogant America blended with suspicion that Israel's intelligence agency Mossad had carried out the attack so that those same Muslims would be blamed for it.

In Mosul, with seven hundred thousand people surviving in tent camps in the surrounding area, evacuated from their bombed housing, thinking themselves forgotten by national as well as international authorities, the

extent of the destruction is nurturing a similar rancor. From this perspective, the reconstruction projects planned by UNESCO jointly with other organizations are of major importance. They will not only ease the suffering of the displaced, but also carry considerable symbolic power in building a post-ISIS renaissance. Should they fail to see the light of day, it is easy to imagine adverse consequences for the Middle East trying to emerge from chaos.

The Iraq projects would also constitute the testing ground for the Syrian reconstruction, a task of an even greater dimension, given the devastation the war has visited on the entire country and especially its cities, from Raqqa to Aleppo, Homs, and the Damascus suburbs. But this presupposes finding a political solution, which, as I am writing these lines (Fall 2019), remains in suspense while the balance of power on the ground continues to evolve. Foremost, a satisfactory culmination awaits a consensus between Russia and the Western countries as guarantors of a peace process. This will be the keystone for a virtuous reinsertion of the entire Middle East into the world order that would also enhance its security. Without it, the Levant's renaissance will remain an empty promise.

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* * *

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Chronology

622: Arabia: Hegira of the Prophet and his companions to Medina.
626: Arabia: Battle of Uhud, death of Musab ibn Umayr, companion of the Prophet.
632: Arabia: Death of the Prophet of Islam.
636: Iraq: Battle of Qadisiyya. Final victory of Caliph Umar over the Sassanid empire.
680 (October 10): Iraq: Death of Imam Husayn ibn Ali, the Prophet's grandson, martyred in Karbala by soldiers of the Sunni caliph Yazid.
1453 (May 29): Fall of Byzantium to Sultan Mehmed II Fatih.
1799: Egypt: Napoleon Bonaparte's expedition.
1836: Egypt: Publication of *Gold of Paris* by reformist Sheikh Rifaʿa al-Tahtawi.
1916 (May 19): Signing of the Sykes-Picot Agreement.
1920: League of Nations grants mandates over the Levant to France and the United Kingdom.
1920 (August 10): Signing of the Treaty of Sèvres.
1923 (July 24): Signing of the Treaty of Lausanne.
1924 (March 3): The Ottoman caliphate ends.
1928: Egypt: Hassan al-Banna founds the Muslim Brotherhood in Ismailiyah.
1931 (September 16): Libya: The Mussolini regime hangs Omar Mukhtar.
1932 (September 21): Saudi Arabia is founded.
1936: Bosnia: Al-Hidaje, a Muslim Brotherhood-inspired group, is founded.
1941: Bosnia: The Mladi Muslimani (Young Muslims) organization is founded.
1945 (February 4–11): USSR: The Yalta Agreements are negotiated.
1945 (February 14): Egypt: U.S. President F. D. Roosevelt and King Ibn Saud conclude a pact on board the USS Quincy in the Suez Canal lakes.

1945: Yugoslavia: The Tito regime dissolves Bosnia's Al-Hidaje organization.

1948: (May 15): Israel: David Ben-Gurion proclaims the state of Israel.

1948: (May): Palestine: Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are expelled from Palestine in the *Nakba* ("catastrophe").

1949: Bosnia: The Tito regime dissolves the Mladi Muslimani organization.

1952 (July 23): Egypt: Gamal Abdel Nasser and the Free Officers take power.

1953: United States: George H. W. Bush, future United States president, starts the Zapata Petroleum Company.

1954 (October 26): Egypt: An attempt on Nasser's life leads to prohibition and disbandment of the Muslim Brotherhood.

1956 (October): Egypt: Suez Canal crisis. Tripartite expedition of French, British, and Israeli troops to the Canal nationalized by Nasser, and their retreat under international pressure.

1956 (April): Tunisia: Habib Bourguiba takes power as prime minister. He assumes the presidency of the Republic on July 25, 1957.

1958 (October): Syria: Mustafa as-Sitt Mariam Nassar, alias Abu Musab al-Suri is born in Aleppo.

1962: Yemen: The Egyptian army supports Republican forces against the Royalists aided by Saudi Arabia.

1962 (December 15): Saudi Arabia: Crown Prince Faisal founds the Muslim World League in Mecca.

1964: Iraq: Ayatollah Khomeini begins his exile in Najaf.

1966 (August 29): Egypt: Sayyid Qutb, chief ideologue of the Muslim Brotherhood and author of *Signposts*, is hanged.

1966 (October 20): Jordan: Ahmad Fadeel al-Nazal al-Khalayleh, alias Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, is born in Zarqa.

1967 (June 5–10): Arab *naksa* (defeat) by Israel in the Six-Day War. Israel takes Gaza, the Sinai, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Golan.

1967 (November 27): France: General de Gaulle announces in a press conference that France will stop supplying arms to Israel and the warring parties.

1969 (September 1): Libya: Colonel Gaddafi deposes King Idris.

1969: Yasser Arafat, head of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), leaves Cairo and settles in Jordan.

1969 (November 3): The head of the Lebanese Army and Yasser Arafat conclude the Cairo agreements, recognizing the extraterritoriality of the Palestinian camps in Lebanon.

1970 (September 6): Jordan: The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), led by George Habache, diverts three airliners to Zarqa.

1970 (September 12): Jordan: The "Black September" Palestinian massacres are carried out.

1970 (September 28): Egypt: Nasser dies and is succeeded by Anwar Sadat.

1970: Bosnia: Alija Izetbegović publishes the *Islamic Declaration*, inspired by Sayyid Qutb's *Signposts*.

1971 (July): Iraq: The future head of ISIS, Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim Ali al-Badri, alias Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, is born in Samarra.

1973 (October 6–25): The Ramadan War (also Yom Kippur War or October War) breaks out. The price of oil quadruples, driven up by the Arab exporting countries.

1975 (April 13): Lebanon: A Phalangist (Maronite) militia attack on a Palestinian bus triggers civil war.

1976 (June): Lebanon: Hafez al-Assad sends in Syrian troops.

1977 (November 15): United States: Shah of Iran Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's visit to Washington is met with violent demonstrations against him.

1977 (November 20): Egypt: Anwar Sadat addresses the Knesset.

1978 (March 14): Lebanon: Israel invades South Lebanon (Operation Litani).

1978: Ayatollah Khomeini ends his exile in Nadjaf and relocates to Neauphle-le-Château, a Paris suburb.

1979 (February 1): Iran: A triumphant Ayatollah Khomeini returns to Teheran.

1979 (March 26): United States: The Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty is signed in Washington.

1979 (November 4): Iran: Hostage taking at the American Embassy starts.

1979 (November 20): Saudi Arabia: Hostage taking by Juhayman al-Otaybi starts at the Grand Mosque of Mecca. The French National Gendarmerie SWAT team (GIGN) helps retake the holy places at the end of a two-week siege.

1979 (December 25): Afghanistan: Start of the Red Army's invasion.

1980 (April 9): Iraq: Saddam Hussein's regime executes Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, Khomeini's personal representative.

1980 (June 27): Syria: Hundreds of Islamist prisoners jailed in Palmyra (Tadmor) are massacred after an assassination attempt on President Hafez al-Assad.

1980 (September): Start of the Iran-Iraq War.

1981 (May): The Sunni petromonarchies of the Arabian Peninsula set up the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (better known as the Gulf Cooperation Council—GCC).

1981 (October 6): Egypt: The "Organization of Jihad" assassinates Anwar Sadat.
1981 (December 15): Lebanon: The Iraqi embassy is attacked by a suicide bomber.
1982 (June 6): Lebanon: Israel launches Operation Peace for Galilee, which reaches the Beirut suburbs. Hezbollah, a Shiite party inspired by Khomeinism, is founded.
1982 (September): Lebanon: Phalangist militias commit massacres in the Sabra and Chatila Palestinian camps. A Multinational Force (MNF) under UN auspices arrives in Lebanon.
1982: Algeria: Mustafa Bouyali founds the Armed Islamic Movement (MIA).
1982 (April 25): Egypt gets back the Sinai Peninsula, taken by Israel in 1967.
1982 (November 17): Iran: Ayatollah Mohammad Baqir al-Hakim sets up the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq.
1983 (April): Lebanon: An attack on the American embassy results in sixty-three dead.
1983 (October 23): Lebanon: Attacks on the barracks of the American and French troop contingents of the MNF results in 256 and fifty-eight dead respectively.
1984 (March): Lebanon: The MNF withdraws.
1984: Syria: The jihadist Abu Mohammad al-Julani, future leader of the Al-Nusra Front, is born.
1984: Iran issues a postage stamp "in memory of the martyrdom of Sayyid Qutb."
1985 (February): Lebanon: Hezbollah is officially established.
1985 (March 22): Lebanon: The taking of foreign hostages begins.
1985 (approx.): *Join the Caravan* by Abdullah Azzam is published in Pakistan.
1986 (April 15): Libya: American planes bomb Gaddafi's palace in Tripoli.
1987 (November 7): Tunisia: Habib Bourguiba is deposed by Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.
1987 (June): The first Intifada, known as the Revolt of the Stones, begins.
1988 (August 18): Palestine/Israel: Hamas publishes its charter.
1988 (August 20): The Iran-Iraq War ends.
1988 (October 4): Algeria: Amid rioting, Islamist leaders are received by the ruling power.
1988 (December 21) United Kingdom: A Pan American Airways 747 explodes over Lockerbie, Scotland. The attack is traced to Gaddafi.
1989 (February 14): Iran: Khomeini issues a fatwa condemning Salman Rushdie, author of *The Satanic Verses*, to death.
1989 (February 15): Afghanistan: The Soviet Army pulls out from Kabul.
1989 (March): Algeria: The Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) is formed at the Abdelhamid Ben Badis Mosque.

1989 (June 3): Iran: Khomeini dies.
1989 (June 30): Sudan: General Omar al-Bashir carries out a coup. The preacher Hassan al-Turabi becomes his éminence grise.
1989 (September 18): France: The Islamic veil controversy starts at Creil Middle School (Oise prefecture).
1989 (August 3): Iran: Hashemi Rafsanjani is elected president of the Republic.
1989 (September 19): Ténéré Desert: A French UTA airliner is downed on Gaddafi's orders.
1989 (October 22): Saudi Arabia: The signing of the Taif Agreements ends the Lebanese civil war.
1989 (November 9): Germany: The Berlin Wall falls.
1989 (November 24): Pakistan: Abdullah Azzam is assassinated in Peshawar.
1990 (May 22): Yemen: Ali Abdullah Saleh succeeds in reunifying North Yemen and Marxist South Yemen.
1990 (June): Algeria: FIS wins the municipal elections.
1990 (August 2): Kuwait: The Iraqi army invades Kuwait on Saddam Hussein's orders.
1991 (January 15): Iraq: The American Desert Storm Operation to liberate Kuwait starts. The First Gulf War ensues.
1991: Civil war starts in the former Yugoslavia.
1991 (April 25): Sudan: Hassan al-Turabi convenes the first of four Arab and Islamic Conferences.
1991 (May): Saudi Arabia: A group of Wahhabite preachers including Salman al-Auda address a letter of complaints to King Fahd.
1991 (June): Saudi Arabia: Pilgrimage by Egyptian Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman
1991 (November 28): Algeria: Jihadists attack a military post at Guemmar and behead draftees in commemoration of Abdullah Azzam's assassination.
1991 (December 26): Algeria: The FIS wins the first round of the legislative elections.
1992 (January 11): Algeria: The army removes President Chadli Bendjedid.
1992 (January 13): Algeria: The army suspends the electoral process.
1992 (March 4): Algeria: The Islamic Salvation Front is dissolved.
1992 (June 8): Egypt: The secular writer Farag Foda is assassinated, jihad starts.
1992 (October): Algeria: The Armed Islamic Group (GIA) is created.
1992 (December): Somalia: The UN dispatches an international troop of contingents as part of Operation Restore Hope. American troops attacked by jihadists suffer losses and are withdrawn by Washington suffering "Vietmali syndrome"—the fear of getting into another Vietnam quagmire in Somalia.

1992: Francis Fukuyama's book *The End of History* argues that human political evolution ended with the triumph of liberal democracy.

1992 (December 13): Israel: An Israeli non-commissioned officer kidnapped at Lod is found stabbed to death on the West Bank. Yitzhak Rabin has 417 Hamas and Islamic Jihad leaders and activists arrested and exiled to Marj az Zohur in Lebanon.

1992 (December): Norway: The PLO starts secret talks with Israel to lay the groundwork for the future Oslo accords.

1993: Sudan: Carlos, a former Marxist terrorist who converted to Islam, takes refuge in Khartoum.

1993 (February 26): United States: Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, leader of the Egyptian *Gam'a Islamiyya*, is accused of masterminding the first attack on the World Trade Center.

1993 (March): Algeria: Abdelhak Layada, the GIA leader, appropriates the Afghan jihad, drawing inspiration from Abdullah Azzam.

1993 (May): Saudi Arabia: Wahhabite regime opponents set up the Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights.

1993 (July): United Kingdom: Jihadists exiled to London, including Abu Musab al-Suri, publish the *Al-Ansar* bulletin in support of the Algerian GIA.

1993 (September 13): Washington: Arafat and Rabin sign the Oslo Accords.

1994: Sudan: The terrorist Carlos is abducted by the French intelligence services.

1994 (February 25): Palestine/Israel: A Jewish settler massacres thirty Muslims at prayer in the Hebron sanctuary.

1994 (April): Saudi Arabia: Muhammad al-Mass'ari, leader of the opposition, is exiled to London.

1994 (May 13): Algeria: Several FIS leaders pledge loyalty to the GIA.

1994 (July 18): Algeria: The executive authority of the FIS abroad (IEFE) sets up the Islamic Army of Salvation (AIS).

1994 (October 27): Algeria: Djamel Zituni takes over as head of the GIA.

1994 (October): Egypt: Naguib Mahfouz, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, is stabbed by a jihadist.

1994 (December 24): The GIA diverts an Algiers-to-Paris Air France flight.

1995 (June 26): Ethiopia: Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak escapes an assassination attempt unharmed during the Organization of African Unity summit.

1995 (June 28): Qatar: Emir Hamad overthrows his father and takes power.

1995 (July 11–October 17) France: The Algerian GIA carries out a series of attacks instigated by Khaled Kelkal.

1995 (November 4): Israel: A Jewish activist assassinates Yitzhak Rabin.

1995 (November 13): Saudi Arabia: American troops in Riyadh are attacked.

1996: Qatar: The Al Jazeera satellite TV network begins broadcasting.

1996: United States: Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* sets Islam and Confucianism in opposition against Western ideologies.

1996 (March): Egypt: *Gamaʿa Islamiyya* slaughters eighteen Greek tourists in Cairo.

1996 (March 29): France: Jihadists returned from Bosnia are found—and some are killed—in the northern city of Roubaix.

1996 (June 29): Libya: Gaddafi orders execution of 1,200 jihadists in Tripoli's Abu Salim prison in reprisal for three assassination attempts on him.

1996 (August 26): Afghanistan: Osama bin Laden issues his Declaration of Jihad Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Mosques [Mecca and Medina].

1997 (August 29–September 23): Algeria: The GIA slaughters several hundred people at Rais and Bentalha, suburbs of Algiers.

1997 (September 21): Algeria: The Islamic Army of Salvation (AIS) calls for a truce.

1997 (September 27): Algeria: The GIA ceases to exist.

1997 (November 17): Egypt: The *Gamaʿa Islamiyya* massacres sixty tourists in Luxor.

1998 (February 23): Afghanistan: Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri disseminate the founding charter of the World Islamic Front for Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders.

1998 (August 7): Kenya and Tanzania: The American embassy in both countries are attacked simultaneously.

1998 (August 20): Sudan and Afghanistan: American cruise missiles destroy a factory and a training camp for jihadists.

1999 (April 27): Algeria: Abdelaziz Bouteflika takes over and promotes national concord.

1999 (February 19): Iraq: The Saddam Hussein regime executes Ayatollah Mohammad Sadeq al-Sadr.

1999 (March 6): Bahrain: Emir Hamed takes the throne promising political reforms.

2000 (February 6): Russia: Russian troops retake Grozny (Chechnya).

2000 (July 11–25): United States: Yasser Arafat, during a meeting with Ehud Barak and Bill Clinton at Camp David, reiterates the right of return of Palestinian refugees.

2000 (September 28): Palestine/Israel: Ariel Sharon's stroll on the Temple Mount's Plaza of the Mosques starts the Second Intifada.

2000 (September 30): Palestine: Television broadcasts live the death of the twelve-year-old Muhammad al-Durrah, killed in his father's arms by an Israeli bullet.

2000 (October 12): Yemen: Jihadists attack the American destroyer USS Cole in Aden Harbor.

2001: Turkey: Publication of *Strategic Depth* by Ahmet Davutoğlu, future minister of foreign affairs, then President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's prime minister.

2001 (February): Israel: Ariel Sharon becomes prime minister

2001 (September 9): Afghanistan: Tunisian Jihadists from Molenbeek (Belgium) incited by Tunisian Abu Ayadh al-Tunisi assassinate Commander Ahmad Shah Massoud.

2001 (September 11): United States: Al-Qaeda carries out simultaneous attacks on New York and Washington, D.C., causing 2,977 deaths.

2001 (October 7): Afghanistan: Start of the American "War on Terror" targeting the Taliban.

2001 (December 2): Ayman al-Zawahiri's *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner* is published in the Arab press.

2002 (January 29): United States: In his State of the Union address, President George W. Bush names several countries, including Iran, as the "Axis of Evil."

2002 (April): Tunisia: Abu Ayadh al-Tunisi is suspected of masterminding the attack on the El Ghriba synagogue.

2003 (February 5): American Secretary of State Colin Powell speaks in the UN about Saddam Hussein's supposed massive weapons of mass destruction stockpiles and his links to al-Qaeda.

2003 (March 20): Iraq: Start of the American invasion of Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

2003 (April 9): Iraq: Baghdad falls to American troops, symbolized by the toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue on Paradise Square.

2003 (April 10): Iraq: The assassination of Ayatollah Abdul-Majid al-Khoei in Najaf is blamed on Muqtada al-Sadr.

2003 (April 22): Iraq: Four million Shiites take part in Muqtada al-Sadr-organized pilgrimage to Karbala commemorating the death of Imam Husayn.

2003 (May 12): Iraq: Ayatollah Mohammad Baqir al-Hakim, founder of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq and the Badr Brigades, returns from Iran.

2003 (May 16): Morocco: Al-Qaeda claims responsibility for attacks in Casablanca.

2003 (August 7): Iraq: The Jordanian Embassy is attacked.

2003 (August 12): Iraq: Attack on the UN offices.

2003 (August 29): Iraq: Ayatollah Baqir al-Hakim's assassination by a suicide bomber is blamed on Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

2004 (March): Malaysia: The Libyan jihadist Abdelhakim Belhaj is arrested and turned over to the Gaddafi regime.

2004: Iraq: Muqtada al-Sadr founds the Mahdi Army.

2004 (January): Iraq: Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, future head of Islamic State, is imprisoned at Camp Bucca.

2004 (March 11): Spain: Four commuter trains heading toward Madrid's Atocha Station are bombed, causing 191 dead.

2004 (March 15): France: The wearing of conspicuous religious insignia is prohibited in public schools.

2004 (May 7): Iraq: The beheading of American entrepreneur Nicholas Berg by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi is recorded on video for the world to see.

2004 (November 2): Netherlands: The Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh is assassinated in Amsterdam by a Dutch-Moroccan jihadist in retaliation for his short film *Submission*.

2004 (November 11): France: Yasser Arafat dies at the Clamart military hospital.

2005 (January): Abu Musab al-Suri's *A Call for a Global Islamic Resistance* is posted online.

2005 (February 14): Lebanon: Prime Minister Rafic Hariri is assassinated.

2005 (February 14): United States: YouTube obtains its operating license in California.

2005 (April): Lebanon: Syrian military occupation ends following the Cedar Spring.

2005 (June): Iraq: The Kurdistan Regional Government in Erbil is presided over by Masoud Barzani.

2005 (July 7): United Kingdom: Al-Qaeda claims attacks in London that cause fifty-six dead, seven hundred wounded.

2005 (August): Iran: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad elected president.

2005 (September 30): Islamists campaign against the publication of cartoons of the Prophet by the Danish daily *Jyllands-Posten*.

2005 (November–December): Egypt: The Muslim Brotherhood wins eighty-eight out of 518 seats in the parliamentary election.

2006 (January): Palestine: The Islamist Hamas party wins the election.

2006 (February): Yemen: Jihadists detained in Sanaʿa escape and return to Iraq.

2006 (February 17): Libya: Demonstrations before the Italian consulate in Benghazi against an Italian minister who wore a T-shirt bearing the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons of the Prophet. Putting down the demonstration results in dozens of dead.

2006 (February 22): Iraq: Attack by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi on the Al-Askari Mosque in Samarra, home to the tomb of one of the Shiite Imams and entrance to the cave where the Mahdi disappeared.

2006 (June 7): Iraq: Abu Musab al-Zarqawi is killed by the Americans.

2006 (July12–August 14): Lebanon: Hezbollah defeats the Israeli army in the 33-Day War. The victory is celebrated throughout the Arab world.

2007 (June): Palestine: Hamas takes full powers in Gaza.

2008 (April 6): Egypt: Work stops due to massive strikes at the textile mill in al-Mahalla al-Kubra.

2009: Iran: Demonstrators rally against reelecting Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

2010 (June 6): Egypt: A young pharmacist Khaled Saeed dies under torture in police custody in Alexandria.

2010 (October 10): Iraq: The jihadist Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, emir of the Islamic State, dies in an American raid.

2010 (December 17): Tunisia: Mohamed Bouazizi sets himself aflame in Sidi Bouzid after a run-in with a police woman, triggering the Arab Spring.

2010: (December): Egypt: The regime manipulates the legislative elections.

2010 (December 31): Egypt: Attack on a Coptic church in Alexandria results in twenty-three dead.

2011 (January 14): Tunisia: President Ben Ali flees the country.

2011 (January 25): Egypt: Start of demonstrations on Tahrir Square in Cairo.

2011 (January 28): Egypt: The Muslim Brotherhood shows up on Tahrir Square.

2011 (February 3): Yemen: Sanaʿa celebrates the resignation of Ben Ali. Insurgents gather on University Square.

2011 (February 11): Egypt: President Hosni Mubarak resigns.

2011 (February 14): Bahrain: Demonstrators in the tens of thousands gather on Pearl Square in Manama.

2011 (February 18): Egypt: The Muslim Brotherhood's Yusuf al-Qaradawi delivers the sermon at Friday prayers on Cairo's Tahrir Square.

2011 (February 21): Tunisia: Violent demonstrations are staged in front of the Tunis Kasbah.

2011 (February 15): Libya: Riots break out in Benghazi following the arrest of a human rights activist the previous day.

2011 (February 25): Libya: The rebels take over in Cyrenaica's Benghazi.

2011 (February 27): Libya: A National Council of Transition (NCT) is formed in Benghazi.

2011 (March 5): Libya: The NCT proclaims itself the country's sole legitimate representative.

2011 (March 6): Syria: Twelve students are picked up in Daraa for anti-regime graffiti.

2011 (March 14): Bahrain: GCC armed forces enter Manama.

2011 (March 15–16): Syria: Demonstrations start in Damascus, Aleppo, and the big towns.

2011 (March 16): Bahrain: Saudi tanks disperse the Pearl Square sit-in.

2011 (March 17): Libya: The UN authorizes military measures for the protection of people.

2011 (March 18): Syria: Street demonstrations in Daraa intensify following the arrest of the students on March 6.

2011 (March 19): Libya: Western air strikes destroy a column of tanks sent by Gaddafi to take Benghazi.

2011 (February and March): Tunisia: Exiled political opponents are allowed to return.

2011 (late March): Syria: The regime harshly represses the street demonstrations.

2011 (March 31): Tunisia: Rached Ghannouchi, founder of the Ennahda party, returns.

2011 (April): Egypt: The former Mubarak regime's National Democratic Party is dissolved.

2011 (May 2): Pakistan: United States Navy SEALs kill Osama bin Laden.

2011 (June): Egypt: Islamist political parties created to stand for election include the Liberty and Justice party (Muslim Brotherhood) and the Party of Light [Nour] (Salafists).

2011 (July 8): Egypt: Secularist militants begin to occupy Tahrir Square.

2011 (July 29): Egypt: Many Salafist demonstrators from the countryside gather in Tahrir Square and call for an Islamic state.

2011 (July): Syria: Creation of the Kurdish PYD (Democratic Union Party).

2011 (August 20 and 21) Libya: Tripoli falls to the rebels. The jihadist Belhaj enters the Presidential Palace with the Al-Jazeera network's video cameras focused on him.

2011 (October): Tunisia: The Ennahda Islamist party carries the election in the National Constituent Assembly.

2011 (autumn): Syria: Start of the battle for Homs.

2011 (October 20): Libya: Muammar Gaddafi dies at the hands of a lynch mob after his convoy is stopped by a NATO air strike.

2011 (October 29): Tunisia: Hamadi Jebali, named prime minister by Ennahda, explains that his party has distanced itself from the totalitarian heritage of the Muslim Brotherhood.

2011 (November): Tunisia: The "Troika," led by Hamadi Jebali (Ennahda), Moncef Marzouki (Congress for the Republic), and Mustapha Ben Jafar (Ettakatol) takes power.

2011 (December 23): Syria: The Al-Nusra Front attacks a building in Damascus housing the Syrian intelligence services.

2012 (January 23): On video, ISIS mentions plans for setting up an Islamic State in Syria.

2012 (February 23): Tunisia: First Friends of Syria conference.

2012 (March 19): France: Mohammed Merah carries out killings in Toulouse and Montauban.

2012 (June 30): Egypt: The Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi is elected president.

2012 (July): Libya: Legislative elections are slated to take place under international supervision.

2012 (July 19): Syria: Rebels take the eastern part of Aleppo.

2012 (July): United States: Obama declares any use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime to be crossing a "red line," and threatens foreign intervention.

2012 (September 5): Tunisia: The last bar in Sidi Bouzid is ransacked by jihadists.

2012 (September 11): Libya: Islamist demonstrators in Benghazi kill the United States ambassador.

2012 (September 12): Tunisia: President of the Republic Moncef Marzouki describes the Ennahda militants as "democrats with a strong religious streak."

2012 (June): Tunisia: Salafists vandalize an art exhibition at the Abdellia Palace at La Marsa. The vandals go unpunished, and the artists themselves are prosecuted for "violating the sacred."

2012 (November 11): Qatar: The Friends of Syria meet in Doha to organize a national coalition.

2013 (January): Mali: Start of Operation Serval, a French military intervention against the taking of Timbuktu and Gao by jihadists infiltrated from Libya.

2013 (February 6): Tunisia: Boubaker El Hakim murders the Nasserite lawyer Chokri Belaid in the name of ISIS.

2013 (March 6): Syria: Raqqa falls to the rebels.

2013 (April): Egypt: Creation of the Tamarrod movement, supported by militants of January 25, 2011

2013 (April 7): Ayman al-Zawahiri sends a message of support to the Al-Nusra Front.

2013 (April 8): Syria/Iraq: Proclamation of the Islamic State in Iraq and in Shām, known as ISIS.

2013 (June 4): Syria: The loyalist army with Hezbollah's help retakes the rebel town of al-Qusayr.

2013 (June 14): Iran: Hassan Rouhani is elected president.

2013 (June 22): Qatar: Last meeting of the Friends of Syria at Doha.

2013 (June 28): Qatar: The Emir announces his abdication in favor of Crown Prince Tamim.

2013 (June 30): Egypt: Tamarrod organizes mass demonstrations against President Mohamed Morsi. Army helicopters escort them overhead.

2013 (July 3): Egypt: Morsi is dismissed and Marshal el-Sisi takes power. The head of the Salafist En Nour party pledges support.

2013 (July 25): Tunisia: Boubaker El Hakim in the name of ISIS assassinates Mohamed Brahmi, the parliamentary representative from Sidi Bouzid.

2013 (August 14): Egypt: The army violently puts down demonstrations by the Muslim Brotherhood in Cairo, killing several hundred.

2013 (August 21): Syria: The Syrian regime uses chemical weapons in attacking the rebel-held suburb of Ghouta, resulting in 1,400 dead.

2013 (September 9): United States: President Obama consults Congress on intervening in Syria. This does not happen, despite the red line he had decreed against using chemical weapons. The West cancels the air strikes.

2013 (September 14): Switzerland: Agreement between Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov (Russia) and Secretary of State John Kerry (United States) in Geneva for Russia to assist Syria in destroying the Syrian chemical weapons arsenal under UN control.

2014 (January 7): Syria: An ISIS spokesman, Abu Mohammad Al-Adnani, pronounces *takfir* (anathema) and excommunication against the other rebel groups.

2014 (mid-January): Syria: Raqqa falls under total ISIS control.

2014 (January 29): Tunisia: Mehdi Jomaa is named Head of the National Unity Government

2014 (June 10): Iraq: ISIS jihadists take Mosul without a fight as the Iraqi forces flee.

2014 (June 12): Iraq: ISIS commits anti-Shiite massacres at Camp Speicher and its forces advance on Baghdad.

2014 (June 13): Iraq: Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani issues a fatwa calling for jihad against ISIS and setting up the Popular Mobilization Units (*Hashad Shaʿbi*).

2014 (June 29): Iraq: Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi proclaims the caliphate in Mosul.

2014 (July 4): Iraq: Al-Baghdadi delivers the Friday sermon in Mosul's al-Nuri Mosque.

2014 (July 25): Iraq: Ayatollah al-Sistani openly criticizes Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

2014 (August 11): Iraq: Haider al-Abadi takes over as prime minister.

2014 (September): Yemen: Houthi rebels take over the capital of Sanaʿa.

2014 (September 13): Syria: Start of the battle of Kobane between ISIS and Kurdish YPG militia.

2014 (November): Egypt: The Sinai-based jihadist group Ansar Bait al-Maqdis swears allegiance to the ISIS "caliph" and becomes the ISIS Wilayat (province) of Sinai.

2014 (December 13): Syria: The Jordanian air force pilot Muadh al-Kasasbeh is captured by ISIS and burned alive in a cage several days later, with the atrocity recorded on video.

2014 (December 31): Tunisia: Beji Caid Essebsi (Nidaa Tounis party) becomes president of the Republic.

2015 (January 4): Twitter: The jihadist Maxime Hauchard tweets threats against France.

2015 (January 7): France: The Kouachi brothers massacre twelve members of the *Charlie Hebdo* editorial staff.

2015 (January 9): France: Amedy Coulibaly attacks the Hypercacher supermarket and kills four Jewish customers.

2015 (January 26): Syria: ISIS loses the town of Kobane following American air strikes to the Kurdish resistance.

2015 (January 27): Libya: ISIS attacks the Corinthia Hotel in Tripoli.

2015 (February 16): Libya: ISIS disseminates a video showing twenty-one immigrant Egyptian Copt workers executed on a beach by having their throats cut.

2015 (March): Yemen: An international military coalition led by Saudi Arabia takes the field against the Houthis.

2015 (March 18): Tunisia: ISIS claims an attack on the Bardo Museum, in which twenty-two are murdered.

2015 (May 27): Abu Mohammad al-Julani is interviewed on Qatar's Al Jazeera network.

2015 (June 26): Tunisia: ISIS murders thirty-eight tourists on a hotel beach in Sousse.

2015 (June 26): France: An employee beheads a business executive and sticks the head on a flagpole next to the ISIS flag.

2015 (July 14): Austria: The P5+1 and Iran sign the Vienna Agreements (JCPOA) on the Iranian nuclear program.

2015 (September 30): Syria: Russia intervenes directly in Syria with air strikes in the Homs region launched from its new base at Hmeimim.

2015 (October 31): Egypt: An ISIS-claimed attack on a Russian plane departing from Sharm el-Sheikh results in 222 dead.

2015 (October 18): Egypt: Death of the novelist Gamal el-Ghitani.

2015 (November 13): France: ISIS-claimed attacks in Paris and Saint-Denis take 130 lives.

2015 (November 24): Syria: Turkish air defense shoots down a Russian fighter jet over the Turkish border. A crisis between the two countries ensues.

2015 (December 15): Libya: The UN initiates mediation between the rival governments in Benghazi and Tripoli.

2016 (March 7): Tunisia: ISIS jihadists crossing from Libya occupy the town of Ben Guerdane, killing seventy in the process.

2016 (March 7–26): Syria: Loyalist forces retake of Palmyra.

2016 (May 5): Syria: Vladimir Putin organizes classical music concert at Palmyra.

2016 (June 13): France: Larossi Aballah assassinates the policeman J.-B. Salvaing and his wife at Magnanville (Yvelines). ISIS urges supporters to kill intellectuals and journalists singled out by name—including the Arabist G. Kepel.

2016 (July 15): Turkey: Erdoğan survives attempted coup d'état, which the regime blames on followers of Fethullah Gülen. Russia and Turkey reconcile.

2016 (August 24): Syria: The Turkish army launches Operation Euphrates Shield.

2016 (August 24–26): Syria: Turkish forces and SLA rebels chase ISIS out of the border towns of al-Rai and Jarabulus.

2016 (August 26): Tunisia: The secular Nidaa Tounis and Islamist Ennahda party establish a national unity majority.

2016 (August 27): Tunisia: Youssef Chahed is named to head the government.

2016 (August 27–30): Syria: Turkish troops and rebel auxiliaries bombard the SDF and Kurdish YPG to force them out of Manbij, a majority Arab town.

2016 (December 11): Egypt: ISIS takes credit for attacking Copts.

2016 (December 11): Syria: ISIS jihadists reconquer Palmyra.

2016 (December): Libya: Marshal Khalifa Haftar and his troops take Benghazi back from the jihadists.

2016 (December 20): Turkey: Russian, Turkish, and Iranian officials meet for organizing the evacuation of rebels from Aleppo.

2017 (January 8): Iran: Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani dies.
2017 (January 20): United States: Donald Trump occupies the White House.
2017 (January 14–March 2): Syria: Second and final reconquest of Palmyra by loyalist forces.
2017 (April 7): Syria: Donald Trump orders air strikes on the loyalist base at Shayrat from which a chemical attack was launched against the town of Khan Shaykhun.
2017 (April 9): Egypt: Attacks on Copts, claimed by ISIS.
2017 (May 9): Russia: Vladimir Putin and Benjamin Netanyahu review the parade in Moscow celebrating Russia's victory in World War II.
2017 (May 21–22): Saudi Arabia: Donald Trump's first foreign trip focuses on Iran as its main target, offering full support for Riyadh and Abu Dhabi in the war on terrorism.
2017 (May 26): Egypt: Attack on Copts, claimed by ISIS.
2017 (June 5–6): The Saudi Bloc (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt) breaks diplomatic relations with Qatar and blockades it.
2017 (June 6): Syria: The reconquest of Raqqa by the international coalition and SDF begins.
2017 (June 21): Iraq: ISIS dynamites the al-Nuri Mosque in Mosul.
2017 (June 21): Saudi Arabia: Muhammad bin Nayef, Minister of the Interior and Crown Prince, is relieved of his duties and placed under house arrest.
2017 (July): Libya: The last jihadist holdouts in Benghazi are cleaned out.
2017 (July 9–10): Iraq: The international coalition frees Mosul from the jihadists.
2017 (July): Muqtada al-Sadr pays visits to the Saudi and Emirates crown princes.
2017 (July–September): Kazakhstan: Russia, Iran, and Turkey meet at the Astana conference to end the Syrian conflict.
2017 (July): Kazakhstan: The jihadist Mohamed Alloush (Army of Islam) announces establishment of a deconfliction zone in Ghouta.
2017 (October): Palestine: Partial return of the Palestinian authority to Gaza.
2017 (October 5): Russia: King Salman visits Moscow in a first-ever visit to Russia by a Saudi monarch.
2017 (October 13): United States: Donald Trump announces that he will not provide the American certification required by the Treaty of Vienna on Iran's nuclear program.
2017 (October 17) Syria: Kurdish YPG militia and the international coalition complete the reconquest of Raqqa, the ISIS capital.
2017 (October 17): Iraq: Kurdish forces withdraw from the town of Kirkuk, which Shiite militias occupy.

2017 (October 24): Saudi Arabia: In the Riyadh Ritz-Carlton, Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman (MBS) holds the Future Investment Initiative conference designed to attract foreign investments. He announces a series of economic, social, cultural, and religious reforms.

2017 (November 4): Saudi Arabia: MBS confines two-hundred members of the kingdom's elite in the Ritz-Carlton as part of an anti-corruption campaign.

2017 (November 24): Egypt: A group linked to ISIS massacres more than three hundred of the faithful in the Sufi mosque of Rawda (in the Bir al-ʿAbed township) during Friday prayers.

2017 (December 4): Yemen: Houthi rebels assassinate former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, suspected of betraying them to the Saudis.

2017 (December 11): Syria: Vladimir Putin stops over at the Hmeimim base. He declares the Syrian war won and meets with Bashar al-Assad.

2017 (December 17): Libya: Marshal Haftar denounces the UN peace process.

2017 (December): Iran: Unrest and anti-regime protests against the high cost of living break out.

2018 (January 3): Iran: General Mohammad Ali Jaafari, the Pasdaran commander, calls on demonstrators to end the *fitna* (sedition) of the protests.

2018 (January 12): Donald Trump calls on the states of the P5+1 to apply new sanctions against Iran within 120 days, or he will renounce the JCPOA.

2018 (January 20): Syria: Start of the Turkish military Operation Olive Branch at Afrin.

2018 (February 1): Tunisia: Emmanuel Macron, in a speech to the Tunis Parliament, accepts Western responsibility for the dysfunctional situation in Libya.

2018 (February 2): Tunisia: Rached Ghannouchi reaffirms he no longer wants to exercise power unilaterally but as part of a consensus with Nidaa Tounis.

2018 (February 10): Syria: A Russian missile shoots down an Israeli fighter jet over Syria.

2018 (March): Qatar: President Erdoğan announces an increase in the number of Turkish troops at their Qatar base (three thousand men).

2018 (March): United States: Mike Pompeo is named Trump's secretary of state and John Bolton National security adviser.

2018 (March 18): Syria: The Kurdish majority town of Afrin falls to the Turkish army.

2018 (March 21): France: Nicolas Sarkozy is indicted in connection with an inquiry into the financing of his 2007 election campaign by Gaddafi's Libya.

2018 (March 30): United States: Donald Trump declares that American troops will soon disengage from Syria.

2018 (April 2): United States: In an interview in *The Atlantic*, MBS states that the Iranian revolution resulted in a regime based on an "ideology of pure evil."

2018 (April 7): Syria: A suspected chemical attack by loyalist forces in the Douma region kills 40.

2018 (April 9): Russia: The minister of foreign affairs calls on Turkey to give up the positions it recently occupied in Syria (Afrin) to the Syrian government.

2018 (April 9): Syria: The Israelis bomb targets held by Hezbollah and the Qods Force of the Revolutionary Guards, causing the death of several Iranian advisers.

2018 (April 11): Syria: End of the reconquest of the Damascus suburbs by loyalist forces.

2018 (April 14): Syria: A pre-announced nighttime tripartite strike by the Western coalition (United States, France, and the United Kingdom) against loyalist positions intended as punishment for the suspected use of chemical weapons on April 7 results in little damage and no casualties.

2018 (April 26): Syria: Israeli bombing.

2018 (May): The price of a barrel of Brent crude reaches seventy euros (eighty U.S. dollars), a 45 percent annual increase.

2018 (May 6): Lebanon: Hezbollah and its allies emerge the victors in the legislative elections, despite an important breakthrough by Samir Geagea and the Lebanese Forces in the country's north.

2018 (May 8): United States: Donald Trump announces the withdrawal from the Vienna Agreement on the Iranian nuclear program (JCPOA).

2018 (May 8): Russia: Benjamin Netanyahu, at the conclusion of his visit to Moscow, declares that the Kremlin has given the green light for him to conduct operations in the region in defense of Israel's security.

2018 (May 9): Israel/Syria: Iranian rockets are fired on Israeli positions on the Golan, an operation blamed on the Qods Force led by General Qasem Soleimani. Thirty Israeli planes retaliated by bombing military targets of Iran and its allies in Syria.

2018 (May 14): Israel: Move of the American Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Repression of Palestinian demonstrations in Gaza approaching the demarcation line results in fifty-eight dead.

2018 (May 14): Russia: Bashar al-Assad is summoned to Sochi to meet with Vladimir Putin to plan a political transition after the defeat of the rebellion.

2018 (May): Iraq: Campaigning for the parliamentary elections, Muqtada al-Sadr makes common cause with the Iraqi communist party ("*Sa'iroun*"—"on the march").

2018 (May 19): Iraq: *Sa'iroun* comes out on top with fifty-four seats.

2018 (May 19): Russia: Alexander Lavrentiev, the Kremlin's representative for Syria, calls on all foreign military contingents to leave Syria.

2018 (May 21): Syria: Loyalist forces reconquer the Yarmouk district of Damascus.

2018 (May 21): United States: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, in a speech to the Heritage Foundation, lists a dozen demands on the Iranian ruling power equivalent to a capitulation lest they face a reimposition of international sanctions.

2018 (May 24): Lebanon: Saad Hariri, despite his party's defeat in the parliamentary elections, repeats as prime minister.

2018 (May 29): France: A meeting at the Elysee Presidential Palace organized by Emmanuel Macron for finding a way out of the Libyan crisis brings together the head of the Libyan Government of National Accord, Fayez al-Sarraj, Marshal Haftar, and elected representatives.

2018 (May 29): Israel: Many rockets are fired at Israel from Gaza.

2018 (June 5): United States: Following a visit by the Turkish minister of foreign affairs with his American counterpart Mike Pompeo, the Kurdish YPG forces withdraw from Manbij in northeastern Syria.

2018 (June 14): Russia: Vladimir Putin receives Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman in Moscow for the kickoff of the World Cup. Russia beats Saudi Arabia 5–0 in the opening match.

2018 (June 24): Turkey: Erdoğan and his AKP party win both the presidential and parliamentary voting in scheduled legislative and presidential elections.

2018 (June 24): Saudi Arabia: The royal decree allowing women to drive in Saudi Arabia takes effect.

2018 (July 12): Syria: Loyalist forces retake Daraa, the birthplace of the rebellion.

2018 (July 15): Russia: The mixed-race French team wins the World Cup against a monoethnic Croatian team.

2018 (July 16): Finland: Helsinki summit between Donald Trump—who threatened to leave NATO and called the European Union an "enemy"—and Vladimir Putin.

2018 (October 2): Turkey: Assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul

2019 (March): Algeria: Start of Friday street protests outside the mosques that lead to the impeachment of President Bouteflika. Chief of Staff General Ahmed Gaid Salah effectively takes power on a transitional basis.

2019 (April 11): Sudan: Under pressure from popular protests, the military deposes General Omar al-Bashir, in office since June 30, 1989.

2019 (April 27): Algeria: Funeral in Algiers of Abbassi Madani, former head of the Islamic Salvation Front exiled in Qatar.

2019 (April 29): In a video broadcast from an unknown location, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the fugitive ISIS caliph, exults over the uprisings in Algeria and Sudan and calls for establishing an Islamic caliphate in both countries.

2019 (May 3): Israel-Palestine: A missile barrage launched from Gaza causes several deaths.

2019 (June 3): Sudan: The military suppresses an uprising in Khartoum at the cost of 128 dead.

2019 (June 17): Egypt: Former president Morsi dies during a court appearance.

2019 (June 20): United States-Iran: President Trump announces that he backed off a strike on Iran at the last moment after Iranian forces shot down a U.S. drone over the Persian Gulf and attacked oil tankers in the Strait of Hormuz.

2019 (June 30): Sudan: One million protesters take to the streets against military repression on the thirtieth anniversary of the coup by the Islamist-leaning General Omar al-Bashir.

2019 (July 25): Tunisia: death of President Beji Caïd Essebsi.

2019 (September 10) United states: Trump fires National Security Adviser John Bolton.

2019 (September 14): Saudi Arabia: Missile strike on ARAMCO oil facilities in Abqaiq cuts Saudi production by 50 percent. Claimed by Yemeni Houthis, it is attributed to Iranian proxies in the northern Persian Gulf.

2019 (September 19): Saudi Arabia: Death of former Tunisian dictator Zayn al Abidin Ben Ali in Jeddah.

2019 (September 24): United States: House Speaker Nancy Pelosi initiates impeachment inquiry against President Trump.

2019 (October 6): United States: President Trump orders American troops pullout from Northern Syria.

2019 (October 9): Syria: Turkish army and Syrian auxiliary militias cross border between Tal Abyad and Ras al Ayn. Syrian army moves north in zone formerly controlled by YPG Kurdish troops.

2019 (October 11): Syria: Kurdish female secularist activist Hevrin Khalaf killed by Syrian Turkish auxiliaries who also slaughter three other YPG fighters with cries of "Allah Akbar" and broadcast it on video. 745 ISIS prisoners in Kurdish detention facility escape.

2019 (October 13): Syria: Deal brokered by Russia on Hmeimim airforce base between Syrian and Kurdish forces.

2019 (October 16): Tunisia: Qaes Saïd elected President of the Republic with 72% of the votes.

2019 (October 17): Turkey: U.S. Vice President Mike Pence dispatched to Ankara to reach cease-fire agreement.

2019 (October 20): Syria: lines between Turkish and Syrian forces controlled by joint Russian-Turkish and Russian-Syrian patrols.

2019 (October 26-27): Syria: ISIS "caliph" Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi killed in Barisha, in Idlib deconflicting zone, 3 miles from Turkish border, by U.S. Special forces raid.

2019 (November 13): Tunisia: Ennahda leader Rached Ghannouchi elected President of National Assembly after compromised is reached with secularist Members of Parliament.

2019 (November 14): United States: Turkish President Erdoğan meets with President Trump at the White House—while the latter is accused of corruption by House Speaker Pelosi over impeachment inquiry.

Chronology compiled by Damien Saverot and Sarah Jicquel

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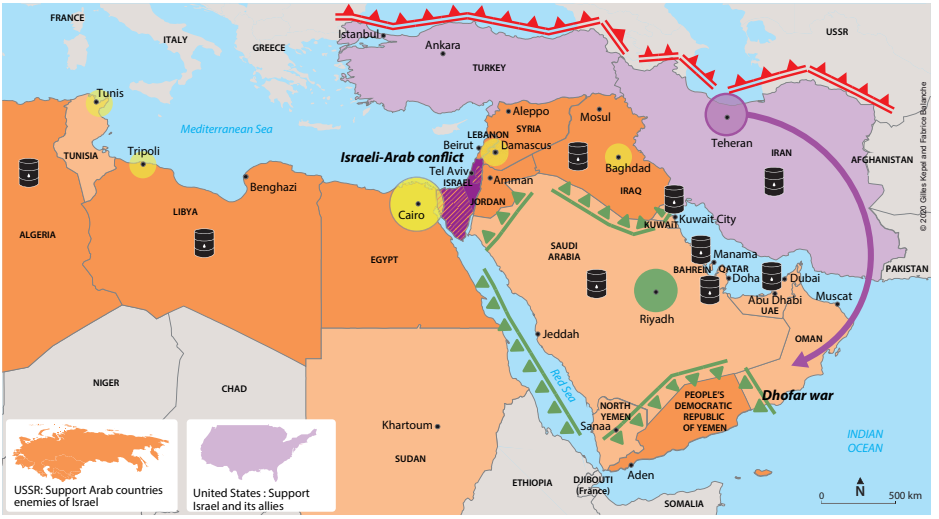
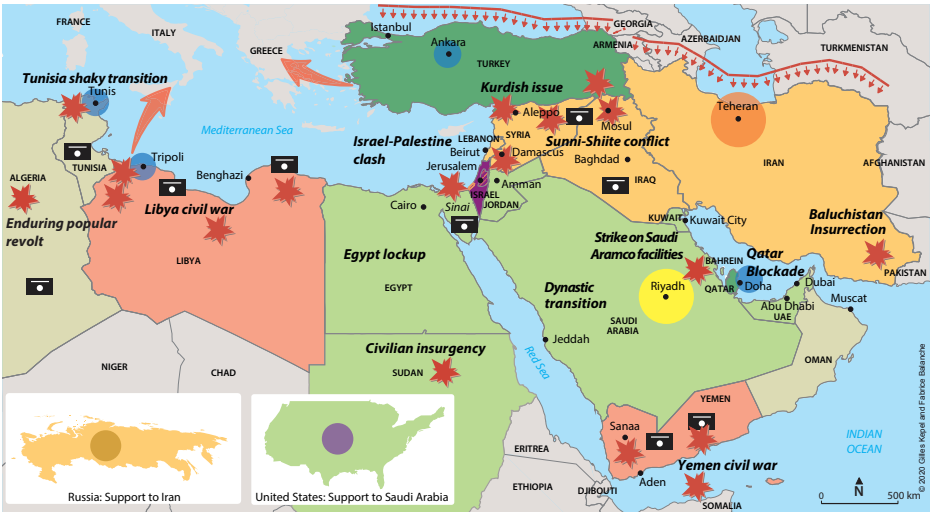


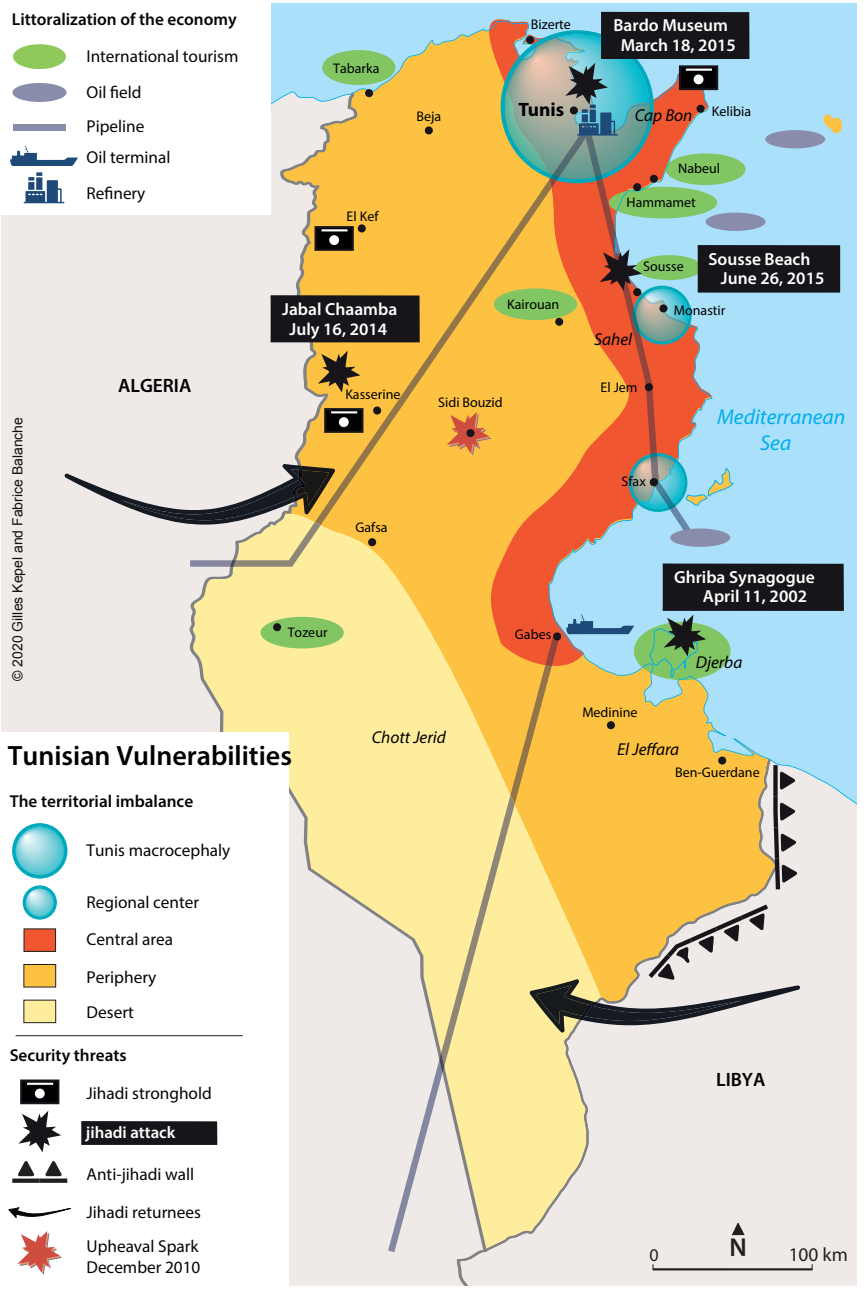
1973 : Israeli-Arab Conflict and Cold War

- Israel
- Occupied territories
- Israel's allies
- Israel's enemies
- Support Israel's enemies
- Center of Arab nationalism
- Competing center
- Center of Wahhabism
- Persian Gulf Gendarme
- Oil producer
- Repel USSR
- Repel Arab nationalism
- Iranian anti-communist expedition to Dhofar



2019 : Sunni-Shiite and Intra-Sunni Conflicts

- Sunni Saudi Arabia and allies
- Sunni competitor
- Shiite Iran and allies
- Fragmented country
- Neutral Sunni state
- Israel
- Palestinian territories
- Beacon of Sunnism
- Beacon of Shiism
- Muslim Brotherhood
- Jihadi stronghold
- Illegal migration
- Persian Gulf Gendarme
- Levant Gendarme
- Ongoing conflict
- Russian influence


Littoralization of the economy
International tourism
Oil field
Pipeline
Oil terminal
Refinery
Tunisian Vulnerabilities
The territorial imbalance
Tunis macrocephaly
Regional center
Central area
Periphery
Desert
Security threats
Jihadi stronghold
jihadi attack
Anti-jihadi wall
Jihadi returnees
Upheaval Spark December 2010
Bizerte
Bardo Museum March 18, 2015
Tabarka
Tunis
Cap Bon
Kelibia
Beja
Nabeul
Hammamet
El Kef
Sousse
Sousse Beach June 26, 2015
Monastir
Kairouan
Jabal Chaamba July 16, 2014
Sahel
ALGERIA
Kasserine
Sidi Bouzid
El Jem
Mediterranean Sea
Sfax
Gafsa
Ghriba Synagogue April 11, 2002
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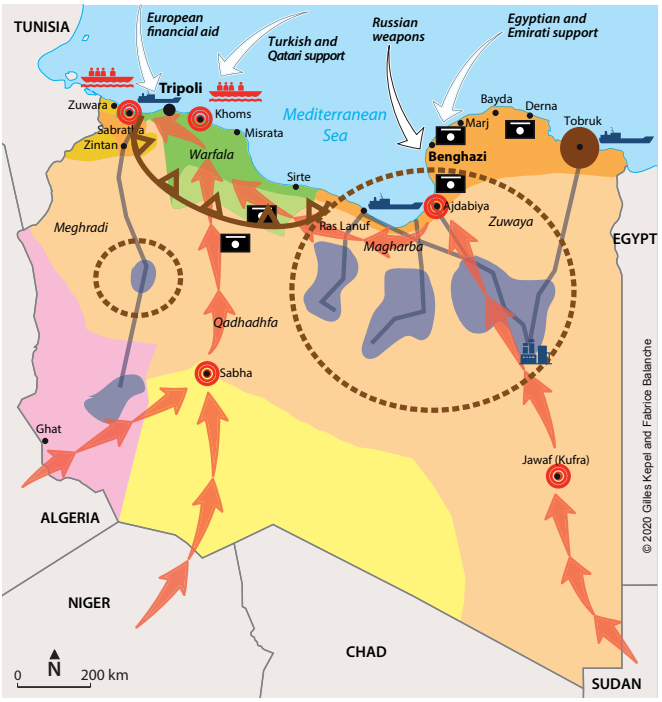


Libya Disintegration, Fall 2019

AREAS OF CONTROL

Inhabited / Desert

- Gov. of Tripoli
- Marshal Haftar
- Amazigh
- Tubu
- Tuareg
- ISIS
- *Zuwaya* — Tribe

HYDROCARBONS

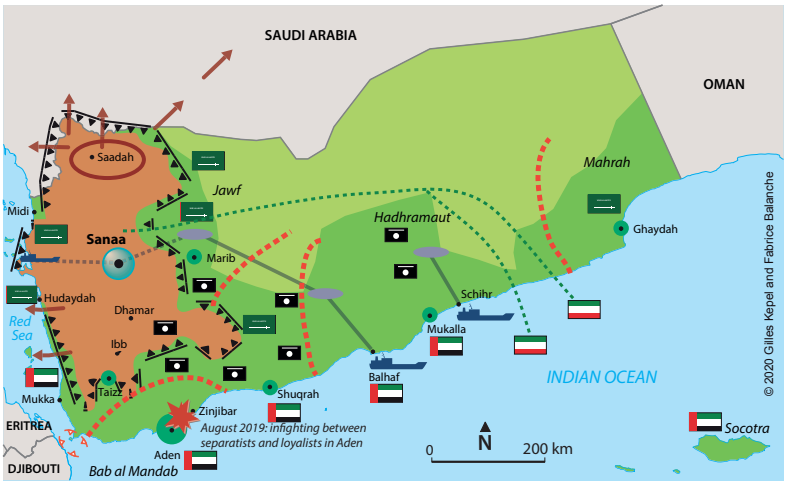
- Oil field
- Pipeline
- Oil terminal
- Refinery

SMUGGLING OF MIGRANTS

- Migrants' routes
- Migrants' market
- Boarding area

MARSHAL HAFTAR STRATEGY

- Surround Tripoli
- Control Parliament
- Control hydrocarbons



Yemen in Tatters, Fall 2019

HYDROCARBONS

- Oil field
- Pipeline
- Closed pipeline
- Oil terminal

AREAS OF CONTROL

Inhabited / Desert

- Government
- Houthi

HOUTHI INSURRECTION

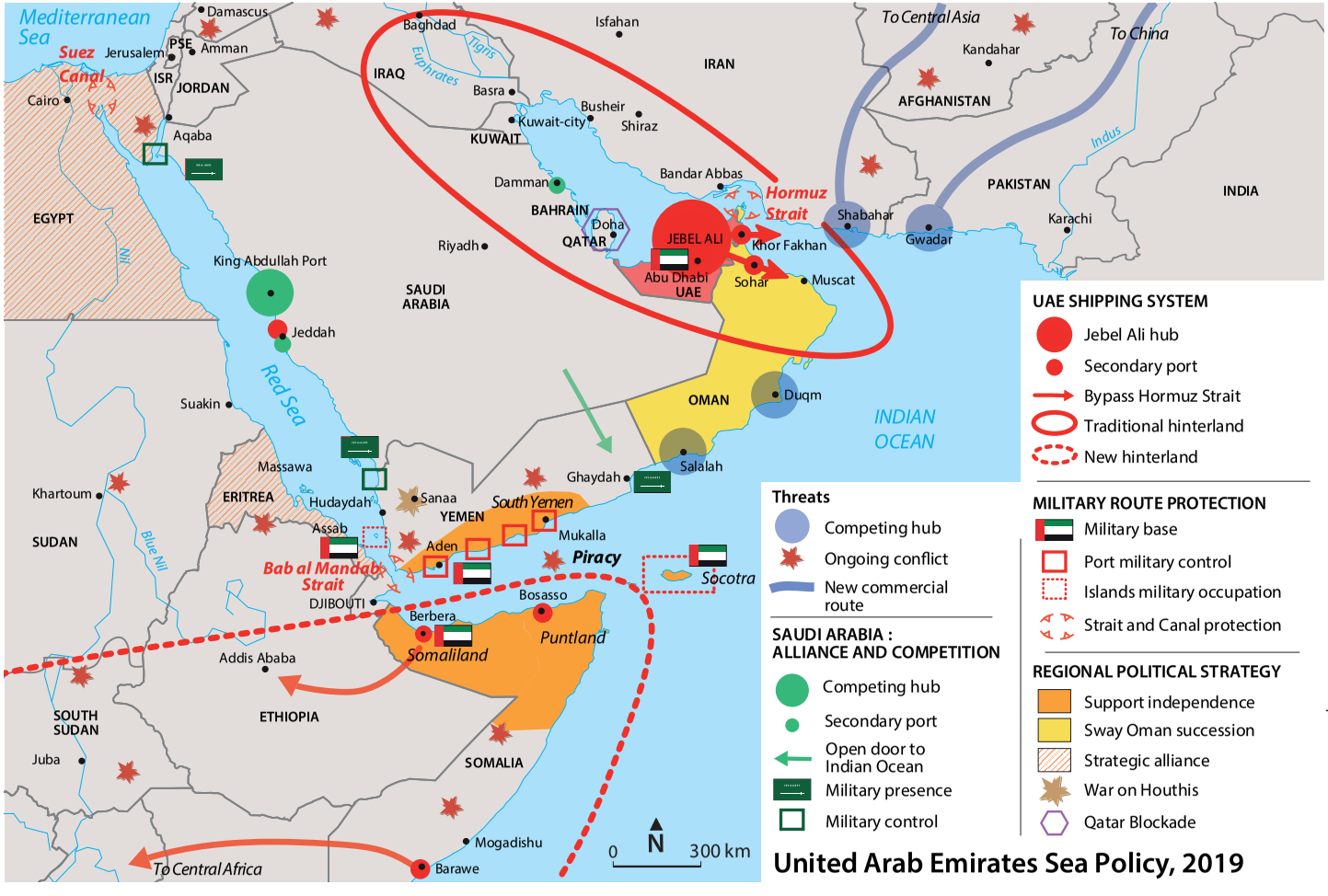
- Houthi stronghold
- Iranian weapons
- Missile fire

ANTI-HOUTHI FOREIGN INTERVENTION

- Saudi control
- Emirati control
- Anti-Houthi blockade
- Protection of Bab al Mandab strait
- Saudi-Emirati competition

POLITICAL FRAGMENTATION

- Official capital city
- Government
- Independent center
- Informal border
- Al-Qaeda stronghold



United Arab Emirates Sea Policy, 2019

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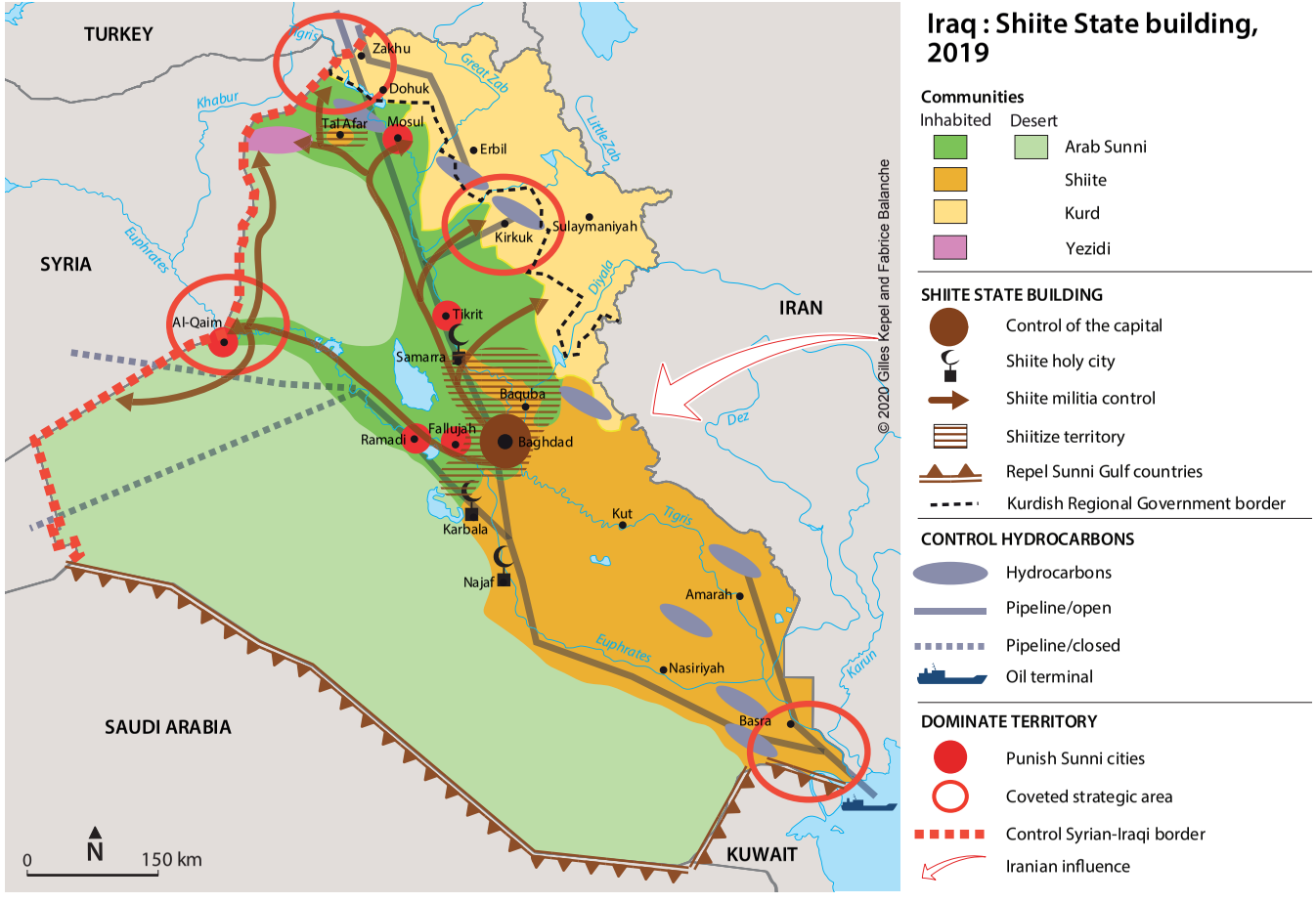


Iraq : Shiite State building, 2019

Communities

Inhabited / Desert

- Arab Sunni
- Shiite
- Kurd
- Yezidi

SHIITE STATE BUILDING

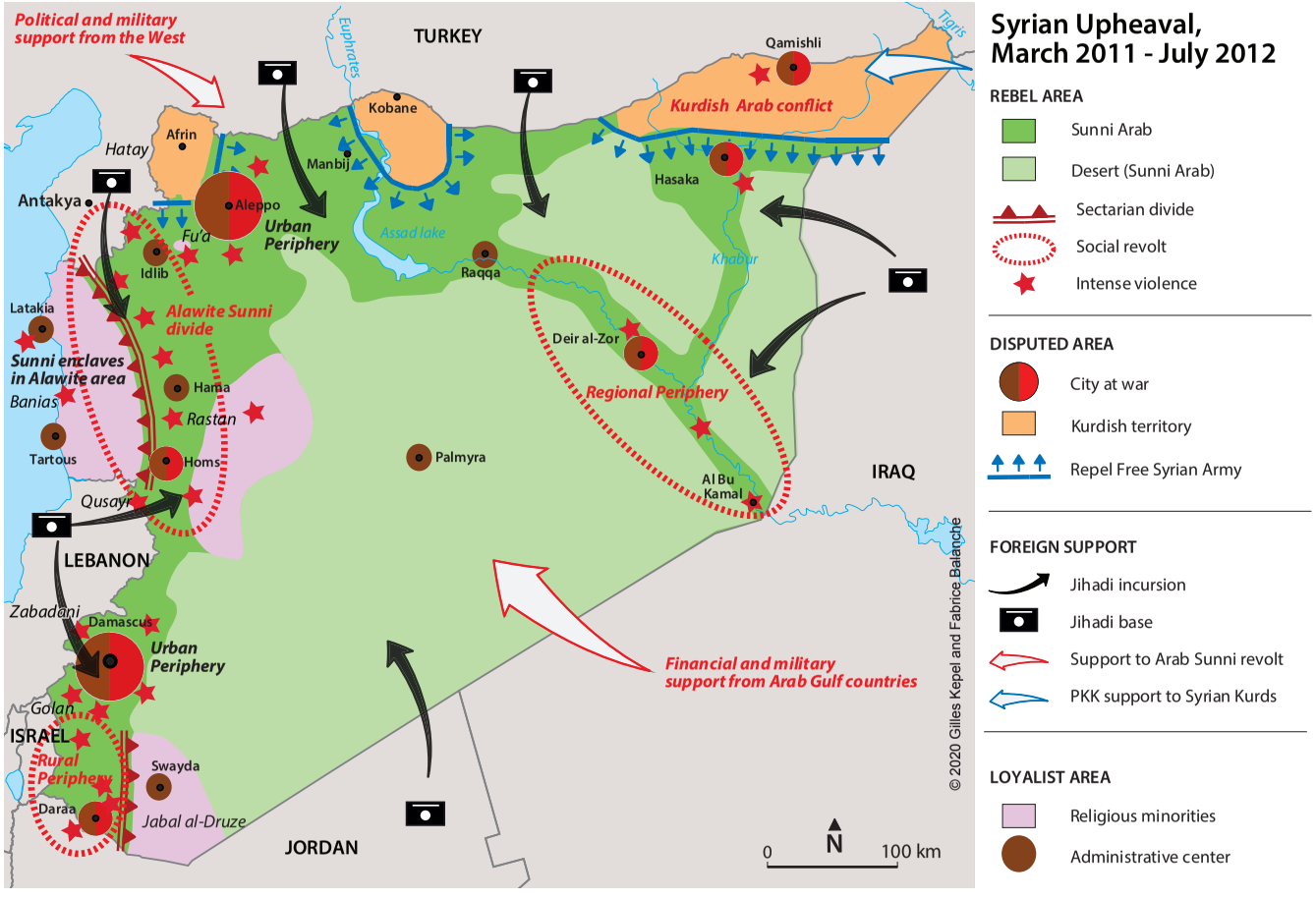
- Control of the capital
- Shiite holy city
- Shiite militia control
- Shiitize territory
- Repel Sunni Gulf countries
- Kurdish Regional Government border

CONTROL HYDROCARBONS

- Hydrocarbons
- Pipeline/open
- Pipeline/closed
- Oil terminal

DOMINATE TERRITORY

- Punish Sunni cities
- Coveted strategic area
- Control Syrian-Iraqi border
- Iranian influence



Syrian Upheaval, March 2011 - July 2012

REBEL AREA

- Sunni Arab
- Desert (Sunni Arab)
- Sectarian divide
- Social revolt
- Intense violence

DISPUTED AREA

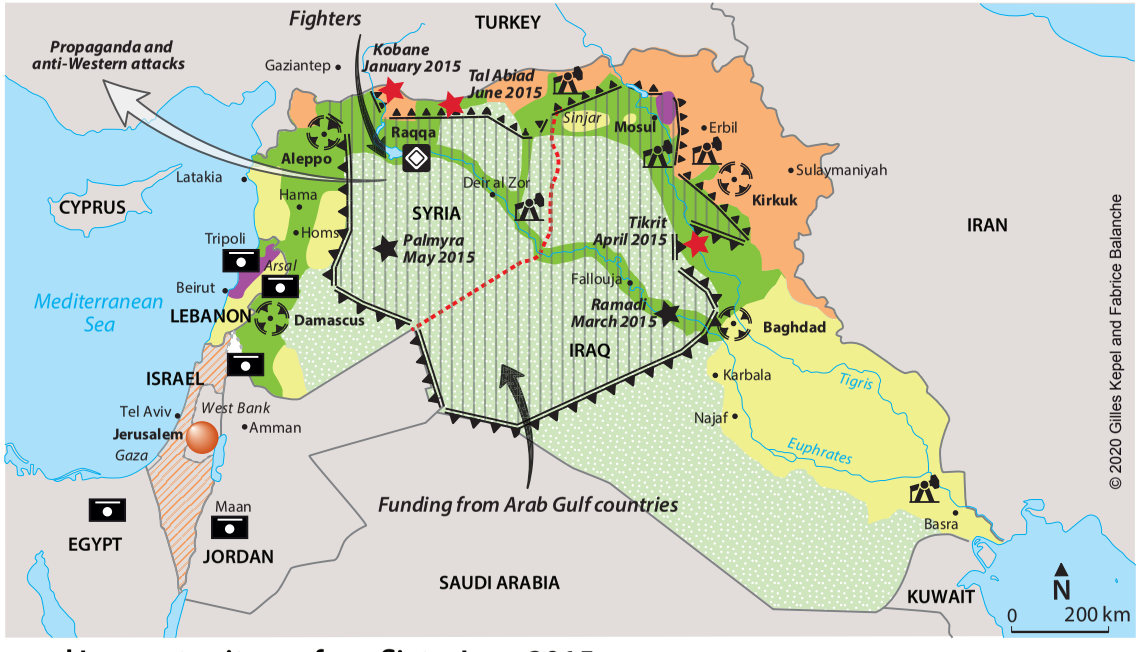
- City at war
- Kurdish territory
- Repel Free Syrian Army

FOREIGN SUPPORT

- Jihadi incursion
- Jihadi base
- Support to Arab Sunni revolt
- PKK support to Syrian Kurds

LOYALIST AREA

- Religious minorities
- Administrative center



ISIS in Syria and Iraq: a territory of conflicts, June 2015

MILITARY FRONT

- Anti-Kurdish front
- Anti-infidel states front
- Strategic target
- Pro-ISIS demonstration
- ISIS victory
- ISIS defeat

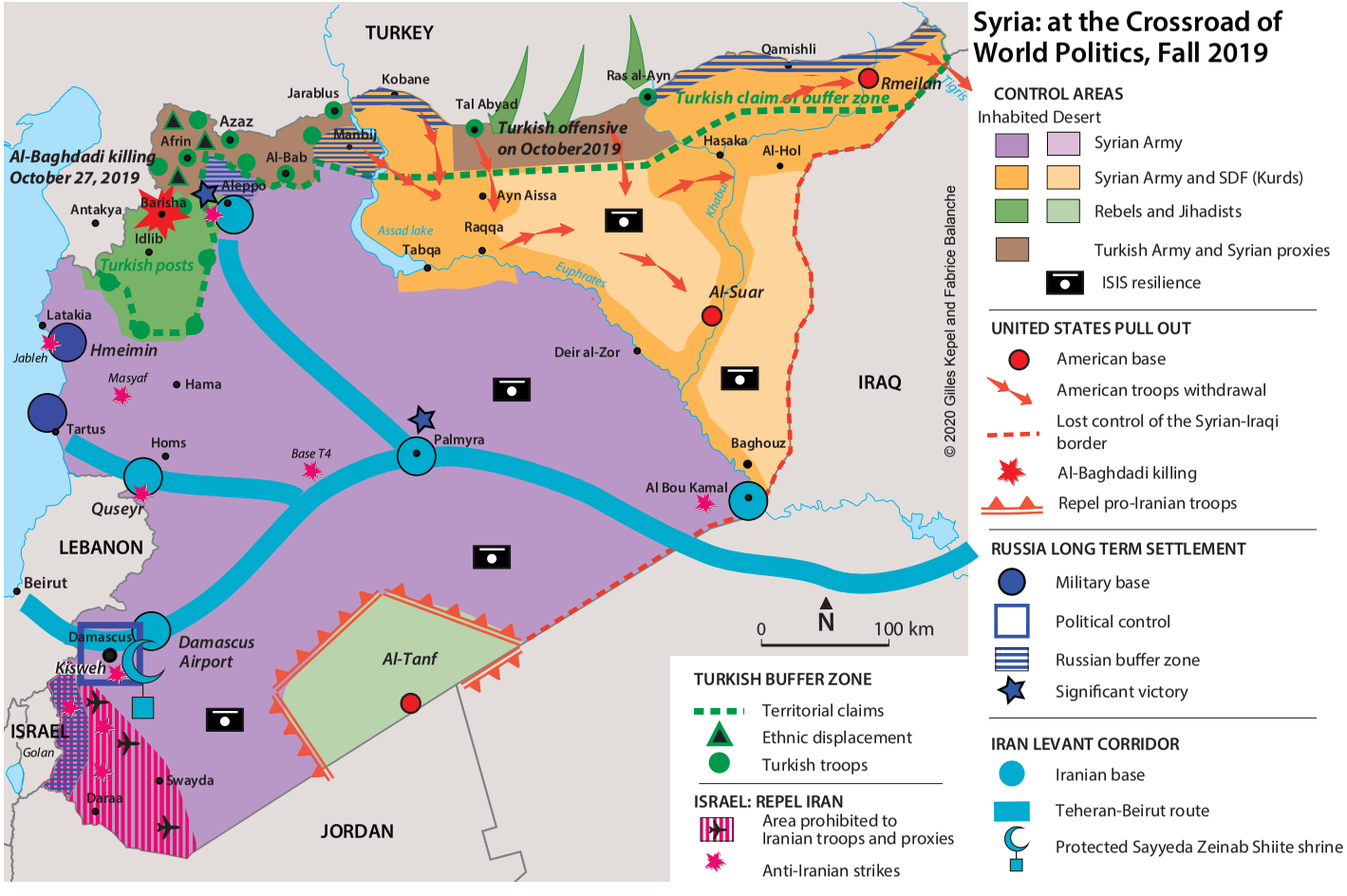
THE "ISLAMIC STATE"

- ISIS territory
- Capital city
- Arab Sunni population to be conquered
- Kurdish population to be re-islamicized
- Oil field
- Foreign support
- Anti-Western action

MOBILIZING UTOPIA

- Reconquer Jerusalem
- Destroy Israel
- Eliminate heretics and infidels: Shiite, Alawite, Druze, Yezidi
- Submit Christians to dhimmitude
- Suppress the Sykes-Picot border

- Desert (Arab Sunni)


Syria: at the Crossroad of World Politics, Fall 2019
TURKEY
IRAQ
LEBANON
ISRAEL
JORDAN
Qamishli
Kobane
Jarablus
Ras al-Ayn
Rmeilan
Tal Abyad
Turkish claim of buffer zone
Turkish offensive on October2019
Azaz
Afrin
Manbij
Al-Bab
Hasaka
Al-Hol
Al-Baghdadi killing October 27, 2019
Aleppo
Barisha
Antakya
Idlib
Ayn Aissa
Khabour
Assad lake
Raqqa
Tabqa
Euphrates
Turkish posts
Al-Suar
Latakia
Jableh
Hmeimin
Masyaf
Hama
Deir al-Zor
Tartus
Homs
Base T4
Palmyra
Baghouz
Al Bou Kamal
Qusayr
Beirut
Damascus
Damascus Airport
Kisweh
Al-Tanf
Golan
Swayda
Daraa
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N
100 km
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CONTROL AREAS
Inhabited Desert
Syrian Army
Syrian Army and SDF (Kurds)
Rebels and Jihadists
Turkish Army and Syrian proxies
ISIS resilience
UNITED STATES PULL OUT
American base
American troops withdrawal
Lost control of the Syrian-Iraqi border
Al-Baghdadi killing
Repel pro-Iranian troops
RUSSIA LONG TERM SETTLEMENT
Military base
Political control
Russian buffer zone
Significant victory
IRAN LEVANT CORRIDOR
Iranian base
Teheran-Beirut route
Protected Sayyeda Zeinab Shiite shrine
TURKISH BUFFER ZONE
Territorial claims
Ethnic displacement
Turkish troops
ISRAEL: REPEL IRAN
Area prohibited to Iranian troops and proxies
Anti-Iranian strikes